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DECEMBER 2014 VOLUME 24 ISSUE 12

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound

THE CREATION OF STANLEY KUBRICK'S

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

PLUS

- NURI BILGE CEYLAN'S 'WINTER SLEEP' ● ANDREY ZVYAGINTSEV'S 'LEVIATHAN'
- DAVID THOMSON ON THE WESTERN ● 'STATIONS OF THE CROSS' ● 'THE HOMESMAN'

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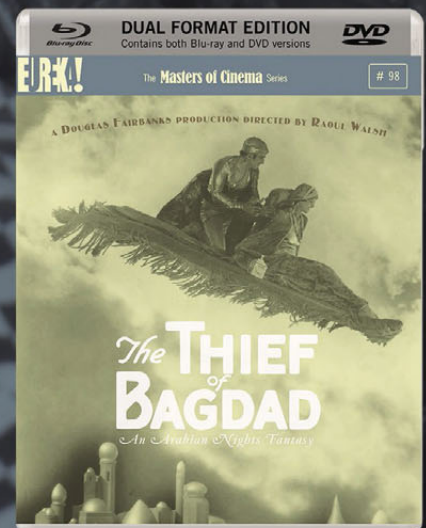
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Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Winter Sleep* is a claustrophobic, psychologically acute chamber drama with echoes of Chekhov, Bergman and Shakespeare. By **Geoff Andrew**

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the creation of 2001: A Space Odyssey

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- EYE FOR FILM

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Keir Dullea in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Design by Nick Wrigley. Retouched by DawkinsColour

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Editorial Nick James



ALL YEAR RED CARPET

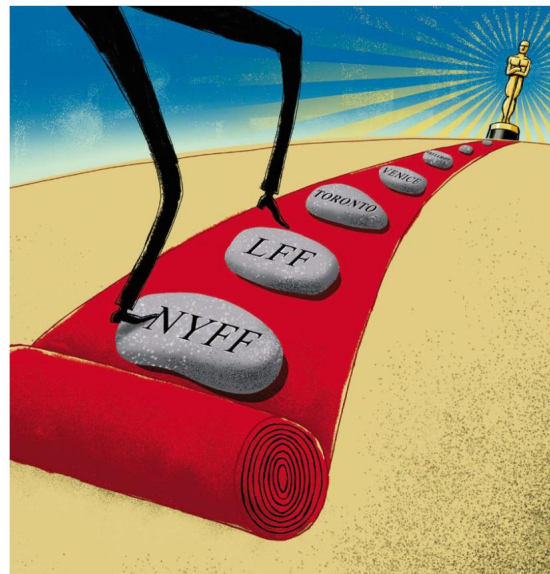
By the time you read this, the BFI London Film Festival will be but a fading memory and my colleagues and I will be exhorting you to experience the 'Fear and Wonder' of science fiction, as signalled by our 2001 cover. Yet in one way the LFF has achieved a more lasting effect in the film calendar, in that it's now seen as one of the stepping stones for films that have Oscar potential, such as *Foxcatcher*, *Whiplash*, *Wild, Fury* and *Mr. Turner*. A significant number of Academy members live in the UK, and producers and stars of award hopefuls find that they can combine a trip to the LFF with a few Bafta screenings, thereby drumming up support for a Bafta award, which itself can act as one of the best kinds of attention-grabber for the Oscars.

The LFF's new status on the Oscar route was generally agreed to have been achieved last year, and it's been interesting to see that this year's New York Film Festival, which takes place at roughly the same time as the LFF, seems to have gone out of its way to become part of the same flight path. It's worth rolling the carpet back to earlier this year to see how this has played out. Many of you will know these details already, but bear with me. Until this year, the NYFF had a reputation as being above that sort of thing, its function, from a distance – I've never attended – being solely to show Manhattanites the very best of world cinema. When summer was at its height, what commentators like me were looking at was not New York but how the fight between Toronto, Telluride and Venice for major American titles would pan out.

This also requires some explaining. By keeping its programme a secret until the day it began and by keeping most of the press away from its mountain location, Telluride had always been able to screen some of the hottest new films ahead of Toronto. Last year, however, a kind of unstated protocol was broken when reviews of *12 Years a Slave* appeared out of Telluride, thereby infuriating Toronto, which thought it had a world premiere. The consequence was that Toronto made a new rule that no film that had appeared at any other festival could play during its opening weekend, when the eyes of the world's press would be upon it.

It was while we were waiting for that particular bunfight to break out that the rather astonishing news came that David Fincher's *Gone Girl* and Paul Thomas Anderson's *Inherent Vice* – arguably the season's two most desirable US titles – would be playing first at New

The Oscar cycle now seems to dominate the way film people think about the whole year. These days, there really isn't much more than a month or so when it doesn't come up as a factor



York. In that one moment, the Telluride-Toronto dispute (of which Venice, which used to be able to negotiate trade-offs with Toronto, seems to have been the biggest victim – though it did bag Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman*) looked strangely irrelevant. And one reason why that was the case is that the Oscar field this year is so weak. You can tell that because it's films from much earlier in the year, such as *Boyhood* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, that still seem like the front-runners.

Perhaps it was inevitable that in the year after such a strong group as *12 Years a Slave*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *The Great Beauty*, *Her* and *Dallas Buyers Club*, the films would look a little pallid, but what's more interesting is the way that the Oscar cycle now seems to dominate the way film people think about the whole year. These days, there really isn't much more than a month or so when it doesn't come up as a factor. Last year, films like *The Wolf of Wall Street* ignored the festival round altogether and came in late to the game – which for publications like this one meant being too late for 2013's end-of-year round-ups, and probably too long ago to have much impact in 2014's. I don't know if *Wolf* would have done better at the Oscars, or indeed with the public, had it appeared earlier, but I do know it might have been featured in more 'films of the year' lists.

There may be latecomers this year too that will feature. Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*, Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper* and Angelina Jolie's *Unbroken* may all yet play a part, and maybe play hell with our own films of the year poll in our next issue. The preponderance and importance of lists and awards are surely the clearest sign that the film business has never been more in thrall to its own marketing. It's the only narrative in town. **S**

IN THE FRAME

THE HOUSE THAT JACQUES BUILT



Jacques Lagrange's set designs were more than mere adornment for Jacques Tati – they were central to how he constructed his gags

By David Cairns

Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967) continues its ascent up the ladder of critical appreciation. Atrociously undervalued on release, it is increasingly seen as the climax of his life's work. The film's use of architecture is central to that.

For Tati, as a visual comedian, the space around the gag was a crucial and inseparable part of the gag itself. The position and design of a chair, the height of a wall or the angle of a corner could not only frame, but make possible a bit of comic business.

Ever since his second film as director, the smash hit *Mr. Hulot's Holiday* (1953), Tati had worked with Jacques Lagrange as his production designer. More than just a designer of sets, Lagrange was a designer of gags, since often in Tati's films the two are one and the same. It is not enough to say that Tati's films create comedy from their environments. His increasing ambitions as a satirist meant that he was creating comic worlds on screen. Contrasting the old Paris with the new in *Mon Oncle* (1958), Tati constructed both from scratch. Hulot's preposterous tenement, an accretion of renovations and extensions, is so entertaining in itself that the camera can simply sit back in the street, as if at a roadside café, and watch Hulot make his winding way up various mismatched stairs and along obscure passages until he reaches the top flat.

For the home of Hulot's sister, Lagrange created a Le Corbusier pastiche by collaging together images from architectural magazines, which perhaps accounts for the subtlety of his parody: all the elements are authentic, but the proportions are ever so slightly absurd.

Lagrange was a painter and tapestry designer whose film career consisted solely of his work with Tati, for which he is credited as 'artistic collaborator' and sometimes co-writer: he was Tati's most long-term artistic partner. Since the visual comedian often had trouble explaining what he wanted, part of Lagrange's role was to sketch ideas, producing hundreds

Pipe dreams: for Jacques Tati the space around the gag was a crucial part of the gag itself

Sci-Fi Compendium

With a range of lavishly illustrated essays by experts and novelists such as Kim Newman, Stephen Baxter and Alastair Reynolds, the accompanying book to the BFI's nationwide season, 'Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder', charts a course through the history of science-fiction film and television, taking in space operas, dystopias and special effects, as well as silent, budget and avant-garde sci-fi, Afrofuturism, costume design and much more.



Into Film Festival

Children and young adults are normally targeted by the odd screening or sidebar at most festivals; here they get their own event with more than 150 films showing at 520 venues across the UK from 4-21 November. Highlights include a programme of films about childhood, a survey of animation studio LAIKA, including its latest 'The Boxtrolls' (right), as well as masterclasses and workshops.



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An office and a gentleman: Tati in *Playtime* (1967), increasingly seen as the high point of his life's work

of drawings until he succeeded in illustrating what was on Tati's mind. In the process, he contributed many ideas of his own.

As Tati's films became more concerned with encroaching modernity, Lagrange was called upon to create more and more. For *Hulot*, he drew beach cabins for changing in, a false entrance to a real hotel, and the defective kayak which causes Mr. Hulot so much trouble. By the time of *Mon Oncle* Lagrange and Tati had to fully create two homes and a factory. For *Playtime* they built a city.

Tativille was a stupendous undertaking, and the corners cut only make it sound more ingenious and incredible. The skyscrapers raised outside Paris were two-dimensional flats, built on rails so they could be slid around and recombined to suggest a sprawling metropolis. When Tati wanted shiny metallic surfaces without the problem of reflections showing the camera crew, he had photographs taken of shiny metal surfaces and printed them up on vast sheets of matte paper: an image of shininess is just as good as actual shininess.

After the vast scale of *Playtime*, *Traffic* (1971) was bound to seem a let-down, but it saw Tati and Lagrange working just as inventively on a tiny

scale: all the film's modern gadgets are packed into a single 'camper car', folding up, doubling up and miniaturising themselves ingeniously. Tati, despite appearances, was not against modernity: he seems delighted by it. He just wanted it to exist side by side with the old world.

Parade (1974) saw Lagrange as co-writer (he also designed the poster). Made for television and shot partly on tape, set entirely in a theatre, it was again viewed as a sad aftermath; but setting aside unrealistic expectations, it can be seen as a true development of Tati's life work. Where in *Playtime* cardboard cut-outs had been used as a cost-effective way to replace extras, here they are brought into the foreground as Tati and some fellow clowns stage a variety act for a live audience who are slowly replaced by 2D facsimiles. Tati recreates his act from his earliest music-hall days, and the world has become authentically a stage: exteriors are eliminated, as is the boundary between performers and audience. Each becomes as stylised – or as real – as the other. 

 **Playtime is rereleased in UK cinemas on 7 November. A Tati season runs at BFI Southbank, London, until November 20**

Vlado Kristl

The pioneering shorts and radical anarchist features of this little-known German auteur receive their due from 7-16 November at London's Tate Modern, among them his early avant-garde animations such as 'Don Quixote' (1961, right) and 'Prometheus' (1966).



Leeds International Film Festival

Beyond the UK premieres, including Alejandro González Iñárritu's 'Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)' (right) and Pascale Ferran's 'Bird People', this year's edition (5-20 November) boasts some fascinating historical programmes, from Konstantin Lopushansky's apocalyptic visions to Alex de la Iglesia's overlooked black comedies and horrors, as well as Ingmar Bergman's films set on his adopted island of Fårö and a retrospective dedicated to Spanish directors Luis García Berlanga and Juan Antonio Bardem.

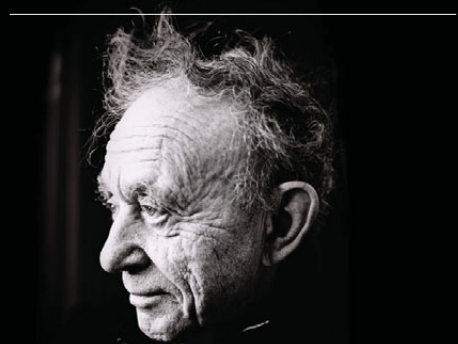
LISTOMANIA DANGEROUS GAMES

As Katniss Everdeen returns to the arena in *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1*, we look back on other films about treacherous games.

- 1 **The Most Dangerous Game** (1932)
Irving Pichel & Ernest B. Schoedsack
- 2 **The 10th Victim** (1965)
Elio Petri
- 3 **Punishment Park** (1971)
Peter Watkins
- 4 **Death Race 2000** (1975)
Paul Bartel
- 5 **Rollerball** (1975)
Norman Jewison
- 6 **The Running Man** (1987)
Paul Michael Glaser
- 7 **Surviving the Game** (1994)
Ernest R. Dickerson
- 8 **The Game** (1997)
David Fincher
- 9 **The Cube** (1997)
Vincenzo Natali
- 10 **Battle Royale** (2000)
Fukasaku Kinji



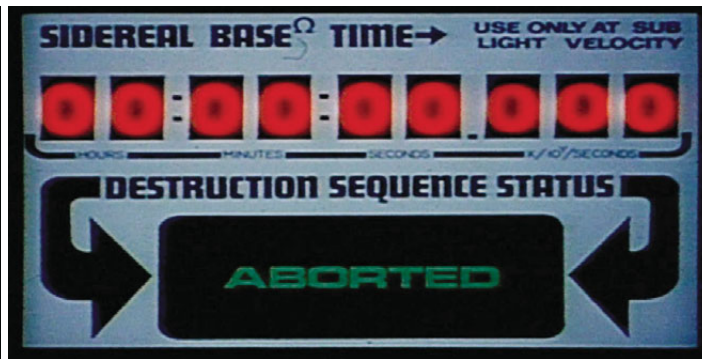
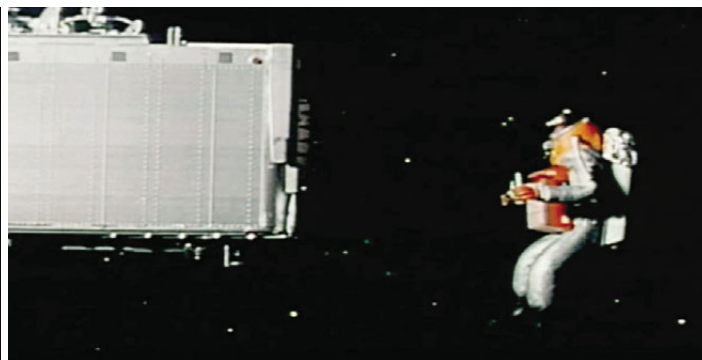
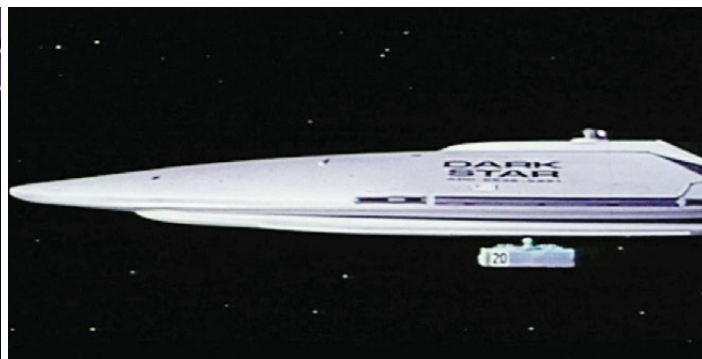
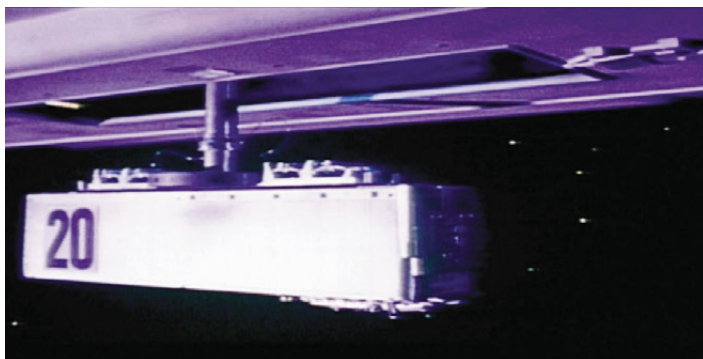
QUOTE OF THE MONTH FREDERICK WISEMAN



'I never start off with a thesis. I keep my eyes and my big ears open and I respond to the experience of the place'
From a masterclass at the London Film Festival



TOO CLEVER BY HALF



A disarming manner: Lieutenant Doolittle (Brian Narelle) ventures outside the ship to reason with Bomb 20 in John Carpenter's goofy, glamourless *Dark Star*

As the 'smart bomb' in John Carpenter's *Dark Star* demonstrates, nothing is more explosive than the ability to think



By Hannah McGill

"Don't give me any of that intelligent life stuff. Just find me something I can blow up," comes the instruction from Lieutenant Doolittle

(Brian Narelle) as tempers fray and fatigue deepens in John Carpenter's goofy, glamourless space meander, *Dark Star* (1974). As it transpires, the intelligent life that's going to get in his way isn't on the planets he's out to destroy; it's housed in the bomb itself, a 'smart' weapon with which the crew can communicate. Upon getting stuck in the bay on its way out, Bomb 20 can see no option but to explode anyway, destroying the ship and the crew. It's a bomb. That's what it's meant to do. The conferral of intelligence upon a piece of machinery has not made it safer for its human handlers, but more dangerous, because it

is using its limited reasoning to opt for maximum destructiveness. "You taught me language, and my profit on't/Is, I know how to curse," says Caliban to Prospero in *The Tempest*; Bomb 20's take is, "You taught me what I am, so I'm going to see that through, even if I take you all out with me." A philosophical chat with a desperate Doolittle while the clock ticks almost turns the bomb's intentions around—since it can't be sure of the existence of the universe beyond itself, how can it rely on the data that it thinks has instructed it to explode?—but finally has the opposite effect, causing the bomb to have a sort of existential breakdown. If external input is all false data, Doolittle is false data too; the bomb can only be certain of itself; its purpose can only be to create light in the empty darkness around it; BANG.

Like its clear precursor, 2001: *A Space Odyssey's* self-aware ship's computer HAL 9000, *Dark Star's* bomb presents a nihilistic spin on Isaac Asimov's 1942 Laws of Robotics, which suggest that a robot's self-preservation is not to be prioritised over the safety of a human or the execution of a human order; and on the frequent fictional challenge they face, whereby the development of consciousness in robots poses a moral challenge to this inferior status. Robots possessed

of burgeoning intelligence might gratify the audience by evolving human-style emotions, as in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) ("I know now why you cry"), or even ethics, as in *The Iron Giant* (1999) ("I am not a gun"); frequently, as in both of those movies, they solve the narrative problem of their own conscious existence by making an informed choice for self-sacrifice. Consciousness, in these examples, is represented by the capacity to identify and differentiate 'right' and 'wrong', allied to which is a capacity to care about other individuals. But if endowed with human-style consciousness and emotions, why wouldn't



Inside HAL in 2001: *A Space Odyssey*

feeling machines, like humans, sometimes become confused, or go mad? Or just get *bored*?

The subversiveness of *Dark Star* lies in its rejection of certain dominant tenets of space travel and science-fiction narratives. The notion that interstellar adventure has an inherent grandeur and importance is exploded, as is any assumption that it will forever be undertaken – as in *The Right Stuff* (1983) – by the best and the brightest. These astronauts are dull, frustrated individuals carrying out menial work; “truck drivers in space”, as director John Carpenter famously put it. And any consciousness-expanding, life-enhancing effect of the experience, of the sort lovingly shared by real ex-astronauts in the documentary likes of *In the Shadow of the Moon* (2007), is countered by the dull thud of existential restlessness: the gnawing desire, even when at the frontier of human knowledge, to be somewhere else, doing something else. (Surfing, in Lt Doolittle’s case.)

The term ‘smart bomb’ was only just coming into use when *Dark Star* was made, and would become most prominent as a replacement for ‘guided missile’ during the 1991 Gulf War. A 1979 article by Jonathan V. Post for the science magazine *Omni*, titled ‘Cybernetic war’, explained to its readers that “a ‘smart’ bomb is one that uses sensors (such as television cameras) and a compact computer to mimic the human process of perception and decision-making, thus finding its target by planning, instead of blind luck”. Such devices had, however, been in use since World War II, when the Germans

If endowed with human-style consciousness and emotions, why wouldn’t machines sometimes become confused, or go mad?

successfully deployed one of their ‘Fritz X’ guided missiles to sink the Italian battleship *Roma*. Pathé news footage from 1952 excitedly introduces the ‘Tarzon’, an American “bomb with a brain” that it credits with “an eerie, almost human understanding”, and suggests “could be the world’s most terrifying weapon”.

It’s curious that the imitation of human understanding is presented as a prospect more “terrifying” than random destructiveness. Perhaps the fear stems from an underlying awareness that human traits, however much we might strain to develop them in gadgets and encourage them in other animals, don’t form part of predictable or reliable packages of behaviour. Said Asimov of his robot laws, “The Three Laws are the only way in which rational human beings can deal with robots – or with anything else. But when I say that, I always remember (sadly) that human beings are not always rational.” Which surely damns their most sophisticated robots to irrationality, too. The effort to construct more effective machines by instilling them with human-like behaviours therefore presents an intriguingly contradictory picture, in which the certainty initially displayed by *Dark Star*’s bomb – “What is your one purpose in life?” “To explode, of course!” – might even be regarded as a little enviable. 📡

BE NATIONAL ARCHIVE (3)

THE FIVE KEY...

WHISTLEBLOWER FILMS

As Laura Poitras’s *Citizenfour* hits UK screens, we honour cinema’s finest bean spillers for refusing to bow to corruption and cover-ups

By Michael Brooke

Whistleblowing – the noble act undertaken by individuals who, as Hitchcock might have put it, “know too much” – is an intrinsically dramatic subject, as the newly released *Citizenfour*, Laura Poitras’s portrait of surveillance whistleblower Edward Snowden, amply demonstrates. Indeed, although marketed as entertainment, most of the films cited here were inspired by actual events, and all tackled distinctly hot-potato material, even if looking back almost half a century (*The Nasty Girl*). But that only accentuates their potency: in watching them, one becomes a fellow-conspirator, sharing the thrill of discovery while avoiding the possible consequences of exposure.



1 On the Waterfront (1954)

Based partly on the true story of Hoboken longshoreman Anthony DiVincenzo (who sued for acknowledgement), Elia Kazan’s masterly dissection of mob-ruled dock unions and the drawbacks of standing up to them is elevated to a masterpiece by the tormented performance of Marlon Brando as a man whose ambition to become a (boxing) contender was thwarted by fight-rigging skulduggery.



2 The China Syndrome (1979)

Although fictional, this thriller about a nuclear-industry cover-up exposed by a TV news crew (Jane Fonda, Michael Douglas) and a whistleblowing plant supervisor (Jack Lemmon) raised so many uncomfortable issues that the industry launched a PR counter-attack – only to be humbled by the Three Mile Island accident occurring less than a fortnight into the film’s initial release.



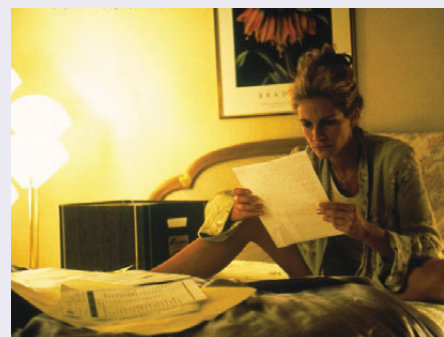
3 The Nasty Girl (1990)

When asked to write about life in her home town during the Third Reich for a school essay contest, Sonja (Lena Stolze, channelling real-life Anna Rosmus) uncovers so much embarrassing information about her elders’ complicity in events that concerted efforts are made to suppress her research by authorities and vigilantes alike – the film’s title being one of the more printable epithets aimed in her direction.



4 The Insider (1999)

Michael Mann has made bigger, flashier films, but few that are as concentratedly riveting as this portrait of real-life tobacco-industry whistleblower Jeffrey Wigand (a barely recognisable Russell Crowe) and the lengths that he had to go to expose corporate perjury on behalf of companies with a vested interest in maintaining the official lie that nicotine is not addictive.



5 Erin Brockovich (2000)

Arguably the biggest whistleblowing household name (at least in part due to Julia Roberts’s Oscar-winning, cleavage-toting performance), Erin Brockovich was a legal clerk who inadvertently uncovered corporate malfeasance to do with groundwater pollution and tenaciously forced the guilty firm into a courtroom showdown with the help of her boss, a small-town lawyer (played by Albert Finney).

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Craig Johnson, the director of the award-winning black comedy *The Skeleton Twins*, talks siblings, suicide and cinematic heroes

By Trevor Johnston

Stop me if you've heard this one before. The indie movie that no one wanted to finance ends up winning the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award at Sundance, garnering rave reviews and selling all over the globe. The casting evidently wasn't the stumbling block with *The Skeleton Twins*, a serio-comic tale of sibling solidarity graced by the presence of Kristen Wiig from sleeper smash *Bridesmaids*, *Saturday Night Live* mainstay Bill Hader; and Ty Burrell, twice an Emmy winner as America's nicest dad in *Modern Family*. The original screenplay by *Black Swan* scribe Mark Heyman and second-time director Craig Johnson does, however, follow a decidedly unconventional trajectory that is anything but feelgood.

The film opens with an attempted suicide, the aftermath of which sends depressive failed actor Milo (Hader) back from Los Angeles to stay with his sister Maggie (Wiig), who lives a seemingly idyllic married life in upstate New York. Subsequent events take in self-deception, infidelity, the spectre of failure and a relatively non-judgemental overview, told in flashback, of an illicit relationship between high-school teacher Rich (Burrell) and Milo when he was a 15-year-old student. That's strong dramatic material for a story looking to heal its characters' wounds with abundant laughter, and finding a tonal balance between dark and light proved key for Johnson, as his film intriguingly makes a space for itself midway between indie endeavour and mainstream appeal.

Trevor Johnston: Did you have quite a task to convince potential producers that this Bergmanesque subject matter could actually be funny, touching and enjoyable?

Craig Johnson: There was a period of, like, forever when nobody wanted to do it. They would say, "Boy, this is a great script. It's dark, it's complex, it's funny – but it's way too dark and weird for us,



Laughter in the dark: Craig Johnson

so we're not gonna make it." But, like anything else, somehow you find a way. And we did.

TJ: Was casting performers known for comedy a way of making it easier for the viewer to come to terms with suicide, depression and so forth?

CJ: I'd say the whole process was more intuitive and natural than that. My personality has always gravitated towards the humorous side of things, but it's definitely a gallows sense of humour. To me what I find funniest in life is coping with the dark shit, the Bergmanesque stuff. As we all know, life can sometimes go from tragedy to farce inside a matter of minutes, but these days the genre delineation in moviemaking is so strong – like,

They would say, 'Boy, this is a great script. It's dark, it's complex, it's funny – but it's way too dark and weird for us'



Damage control: Bill Hader as Milo and Kristen Wiig as Maggie in *The Skeleton Twins*

this is a drama, and that's a comedy – you tend not to see stories which represent those sort of truths.

TJ: Those swift transitions from dark to light are a risky business though and when they don't work it's painfully obvious.

CJ: Sure. You go too much into comedic territory and you take the audience out of the realness of the story, but if you push the drama too hard you can end up with eye-rolling melodrama. We really only found the balance in the edit. Take the scene where Kristen and Bill are high on nitrous oxide in the dentist's surgery. Those two improv'd the shit out of that scene and we had all this hilarious stuff. First rule of comedy is that you don't cut anything that gets a laugh, yet we had to prune a lot of it because all of a sudden it felt like you were watching two professional comedians bouncing off each other rather than a real brother and sister. And a lot of what you see is infused with my own relationship with my sister, and the shared sense of humour that's helped the two of us through some tough times.

TJ: In this instance, Maggie's living a marital lie and Milo is seemingly unable to move on from his turbulent adolescence, yet they're united by a sense that their lives haven't really measured up to their expectations. That's not regular subject matter on American screens, is it?

CJ: No, it isn't. I do feel that it's a hallmark of my generation though, as a child of the 80s. It was the time of, "You can be anything". We were very encouraged, and perhaps felt almost entitled, like we were all going to be rock stars or play pro basketball. Some of us didn't question that maybe we would have to work for it, or we were just blind to the fact that we weren't that talented. I know I'm really fortunate to be doing what I love, but if it hadn't worked out for me I'd be suicidal, I'd be teetering off the edge of a building. Yet for most people life is a compromise. Actually, *Greenberg* is very good about that.

TJ: So is Noah Baumbach a celluloid touchstone for you?

CJ: Certainly. *The Squid and the Whale* was a movie which inspired my co-writer Mark to sit down and suggest we write something which was so human and bittersweet. But I look back on Hal Ashby and Milos Forman's early films too, as well as being a massive John Hughes fan.

TJ: For all Hughes's groundbreaking exploration of the emotional intensity of high-school life, he certainly never tackled this kind of seriously inappropriate teacher-student relationship – why take on such high-risk material?

CJ: It's not just inappropriate, it's illegal. That's the black and white of it, but, of course, real life is never quite like that. At 15 Milo experiences the love of his life, he's a sexual creature and carries a torch for years afterwards, even though the teacher's actions are so obviously wrong. It was important to me that we never judge any of these characters, and the Milo we see later, who's an outsider, a bit of a truth-teller, and way too snarky for his own good, is also so damaged that your heart goes out to him. It's like Roger Ebert said, movies really are empathy-generating machines. ☺

i *The Skeleton Twins* is released in UK cinemas on 7 November and is reviewed on page 89



★★★★★
"A MIRACULOUS
MASTERWORK"

Tim Robey, The Telegraph

★★★★★
"Eerily BEAUTIFUL...
the performances are
SUPERB"

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

★★★★★
"A thing of
HEARTFELT BEAUTY"

Wendy Ide, The Times

★★★★★
"Pure cinematic
storytelling at its BEST"

Donald Clarke, The Irish Times

★★★★★
"An IMMACULATE
excavation of political
and personal history"

Guy Lodge, The Evening Standard

Ida

A film by Pawel Pawlikowski

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50 WEEKS TO LEARN FILM, PT 1



Not everything they teach at film school should be practical. How about a little Edmund Burke or nude figure drawing instead?



By Mark Cousins

Should we plant a bomb under film school courses and see where the pieces fall? Might we fire university film studies courses

into the sky, on a magnesium rocket, and see the smithereens fall to earth, like the man who fell to earth, like the climax of Nicolas Roeg's *Eureka*, when Jack McCann finds his gold?

Lots of good things happen in film schools and on film courses, which are often taught by great people, but they have often, too, lost their senses. Literally. They teach about equipment and production, when their job is really to awaken in students a sensory response to the world. This matters now more than ever because there are hundreds of film courses in the UK alone, and if you count the number of them around the world, you'll probably get into five figures. Add to this the little fact that there are now four-and-a-half billion mobile phone users, of which at least one billion have phones that can shoot moving imagery (a virus let loose by the Lumière brothers and Edison?) and you have strong reasons for asking how filming should be taught.

Below are my answers. As I've just read *Werner Herzog: A Guide for the Perplexed*, and been to the Bauhaus museum in Weimar in Germany, where radical ideas about teaching creativity and craft were developed, and since I'm lucky enough to have talked to Samira Makhmalbaf about the methods her father, Mohsen, used in Iran to teach his kids filmmaking, my suggestions are irregular.

My course would be called '50 weeks to learn film'. Like the great American theatre director and educator, Peter Sellars, on day one, when the

students arrive, I'd tell them that they'd all passed, but that now comes the hard part. Then, together, we'd pick up a pack of 50 cards, each of which has a week-long theme or project written on it. We'd shuffle the deck, and then lay them out in a row. That row of themes would be the course.

And what would the themes be? Deep breath:

1 A week on colour: Goethe's ideas about contrasting hues, and the colours in shadows; colour in nature, in the beaches of Harris and Lewis in Scotland; costume and design in the movies of Jacques Demy.

2 Eyeline: Oliver Hardy looking at the camera, the eyelines of the Madonna in Russian icon painting (they look almost at the viewer but not quite), eyelines in the films of George Cukor and Ozu Yasujiro.

3 Wedding films: many of the most profitable films ever made (judged by percentage return on investment) are about weddings – *The Wedding Banquet*, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *Monsoon Wedding*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Muriel's Wedding*, *Bridesmaids*, *Mamma Mia!*. What can we learn from why they work?

4 Nude figure drawing.

5 Focus: in Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Hitchcock, Kira Muratova, Leonardo da Vinci and Mantegna.

6 Obsessive motifs: Scorsese on Lower Manhattan, Picasso on the face of Dora Maar, Lyonel Feininger on the church at Gelmeroda. The students choose a motif and make a different film about it every day.

7 Nature studies: Scandinavian films of the 1910s, the work of Albrecht Dürer, the writing of Rousseau.

8 Thought: in Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Federico Fellini, Scorsese and Forough Farrokhzad.

9 Storytelling, blocking and emotion in 13th- and 14th-century Italian painting: Duccio, Cimabue,

Film schools teach about equipment and production, when their job is to awaken in students a sensory response to the world

Giotto (including a trip to the Scrovegni chapel).

10 Walkabout: each student disappears, goes off grid, for a week, with no means of communication.

11 Other: each student lives a life or has an experience that is totally foreign to them.

12 Kick the truth out: *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On*, and how to show what you aren't allowed to show.

13 The sublime: in Werner Herzog, Caspar David Friedrich and Burke.

14 Storytelling in three-minute pop songs: The Kinks, Squeeze, PJ Harvey.

15 The art of persuasion: how to charm officials to let you in to places (includes Herzog's advice that you should always "carry bolt cutters everywhere").

16 Tension in storytelling: Hitchcock, Stephen King, Patricia Highsmith, Mohammad-Ali Talebi.

17 Poetics: in Aristotle, David Lynch, Le Corbusier and Pier Paolo Pasolini.

18 The mirth of nations: comedy cinema around the world.

19 Vengeance and violence: in Djibril Diop Mambéty, Quentin Tarantino and John Woo.

20 Movement and blocking: in the films of Tsui Hark, King Hu and Orson Welles, and the paintings of Tintoretto.

21 Sound poetics: in the movies of Kira Muratova, Paul Thomas Anderson and Hitchcock, and the work of Walter Murch.

22 Music week: taught entirely in the dark.

23 "What might never have been seen": Films that showed lives that had never before been on screen – the work of Kim Longinotto, John Sayles, Anand Patwardhan and Kenneth Anger.

24 Voice, and how to find it: the distinctive look and feel of the movies of John Ford, Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Michael Mann, and the paintings of Francis Bacon.

25 Performance: A whole week on the film by Nicolas Roeg and Donald Cammell, which will include the students undergoing changes.

That's the first 25 weeks. Sounds exhausting, I know, but I think it could be inspiring. I'll describe part two next month...

DEVELOPMENT TALE

PADDINGTON



iAy chihuahua!: Paddington channels Paris Hilton on the London Underground

How the man behind the Harry Potter films gave another beloved children's character a screen makeover

By Charles Gant

Michael Bond's Paddington Bear stories, first published in 1958, have been adapted for television multiple times, and the iconic marmalade-scoffing character has at various stages found himself incorporated into Royal Mail stamps, Marmite TV advertising and the Google logo. But in 50 years, there has never been a film version. Perhaps the episodic nature of the source material – Paddington gets into a series of scrapes, involving such obstacles as a hot bath, lawn mower and tube station escalator – didn't suggest it as a feature film. And as a lone animal in a human world, his universe could be seen as less rich than the animation-friendly tales of A.A. Milne.

But UK producer David Heyman came to believe otherwise. At the suggestion of his Heyday Films colleague Rosie Alison he reread the books, and felt a strong connection. "The story of an outsider, this bear from Peru, coming to London in search of a place to belong. It's the story of an immigrant. This idea that home is not just where you're from, it's where you

make it, rang true for me, and feels like a story in these times where people are so fluid."

Having secured rights from Bond's agent, and having met the author and his daughter Karen Jankel, Heyman was ready to pitch it to his paymasters Warner Bros, where he has a first-look deal. "I'd been making films for them for a little while, family films, that had done well," Heyman says, with not a little understatement: he was the producer of the \$7.7 billion-grossing Harry Potter series. "With some gentle persuasion, they were prepared to take a punt." In 2007, the film was announced, with Hamish McColl writing the screenplay. At the time, McColl's sole screenplay credit was *Mr. Bean's Holiday*, though he is known for his groundbreaking surreal comedy work as half of the duo The Right Size, creators of the West End hit *The Play What I Wrote*. (He has since co-written *Johnny English Reborn*, and is currently working on the upcoming *Dad's Army* film.)

To develop the world of the film, Heyman brought on Paul King as director – perhaps a surprising choice, given that King's previous film was the low-budget *Bunny and the Bull*, which had mixed creative and commercial success. Heyday comments, "I like working with directors, not necessarily [for] their first film, but taking them from a slightly smaller film to a big film. Alfonso [Cuarón] had made big films, but not quite on the scale of Potter when he did [*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*]. I love that dialogue between

those two spirits." King, a fan of the original *Paddington* TV show, worked on further drafts with McColl, and then alone. McColl receives a joint 'story by' credit on the film with King, who is the director and sole credited screenwriter.

As the years ticked by and no film was announced, speculation began to mount that Warners was losing interest, which turned out to be the case. "They have a set formula," Heyman explains. "When we were making the film with Warner Bros, by the very nature of it being at Warner Bros, it was going to be a more expensive film. And then they run numbers against those numbers. We ended up making the film for considerably less than it would have been." French-owned StudioCanal stepped in, and the film was announced again in May 2012.

By this stage, the team had created a filmic storyline. "We needed to create some opposition for Paddington," says Heyman. "In the books, he's immediately welcomed into the home by all. We've made Mr Brown slightly more nervous about bringing a bear from Peru, or from anywhere, into their home." The more perilous challenge to the bear seems a playful choice for anyone who remembers the popularity of duffel-coated Paddington teddy bears in the 1970s: King has introduced a taxidermist, Millicent, played by Nicole Kidman. "For a multitude of reasons, she wants to complete her collection by stuffing Paddington," Heyman says.

In the books, Paddington inhabits a notably privileged milieu: Mr and Mrs Brown first meet him when collecting their daughter Judy from boarding school, and their home near Maida Vale has a housekeeper, Mrs Bird. The film avoids the boarding-school angle, having the whole family meet Paddington together after a family outing. As for Mrs Bird, played by Julie Walters, “We’ve made her a bit more of a family relative who’s living with them. We don’t highlight the fact that she’s a housekeeper.”

The transition from the book illustrations and TV animations to a three-dimensional character interacting with real human actors required a change in the look of Paddington. “We’ve had to adapt him to be less of a teddy bear and more of a living, breathing bear,” says Heyman. “And we also had to bring the idea of this bear existing in our world, and so we had to shift the design to make him, yes, more bearish, but less bearish than a real bear, so that he could blend more easily with the Brown family.”

Having already announced Colin Firth as the voice of Paddington, the production made headlines in June this year when he “consciously uncoupled” from the film, and again in July when Ben Whishaw was cast as his replacement. Heyman says they offered Firth the role without testing him: “We worked with him for a while, and he [was] wonderful. But what we came to

Colin Firth’s voice is that of a 50-year-old man. We needed a more youthful, higher-pitched, less silky timbre

realise, the character coming alive in front of our eyes, Colin’s voice is that of a 50-year-old man. It’s deeper, it’s got a different feel. We needed a more youthful, higher-pitched, less silky timbre.”

The casting change has been stressful, and also costly. Says Heyman, “We made the decision quite late in the day, and it was a bit daunting, as you animate to the voice. We had to change all the animation – you don’t just stick a voice on the existing animation. So that was a big, big thing.”

Combining live actors with a full CGI character, *Paddington* cannot be a low-budget film, which means it would be a stretch to recoup the investment from the UK market alone. Heyman and StudioCanal – which distributes in France, Germany, UK and Australia – had to believe that the film could remain resolutely British, yet still have global appeal, as Harry Potter did.

Heyman remarks: “To give too much credit or put too much weight on Potter alone... Potter in some ways is part of a long tradition and in some ways is an outlier. Part of a long tradition, as we have been a home of Lewis Carroll, and J.M. Barrie and Roald Dahl. And an outlier, the level of success of the book, which fed into the success of the films, is exceptional. But I have to believe that good films, well told, will connect. If there is universal humanity within a story, it will travel. There are many, many British [family] novels and films that have done rather well.”

i **Paddington is released on November 28 and will be reviewed in a future issue**

THE NUMBERS

IDA

By Charles Gant

Last October, Pawel Pawlikowski scooped Best Film at the 2013 London Film Festival for *Ida*, beating competition from titles including *Starred Up* and *Under the Skin*. The win provided a great platform for its UK release, you’d imagine, but in the event local distributor Curzon Artificial Eye opted to wait 11 months before bringing *Ida* to cinemas. Few would take issue with the commercial outcome – £318,000 at press time, the highest ever UK gross for a Polish-language film.

Released on September 26, just 12 days before the 2014 edition of the festival, *Ida* landed on what is increasingly being recognised as the pre-LFF ‘sweet spot’: a relatively non-competitive window created by the need or desire for many films to be included in the festival and released thereafter, including ones initially launched in Berlin (*Difret*, ’71), Sundance (*Whiplash*), Cannes (*Mr. Turner*, *Foxcatcher*, *Winter Sleep*), Venice (*The Cut*) or Toronto (*The Imitation Game*). If you opt not to play the festival – or, as in *Ida*’s case, play the LFF but then wait almost a whole calendar year to release – you might well grab the chance of a clear run at audiences.

When Curzon acquired *Ida*, it was already booked to play London, but the distributor couldn’t see a way to date it by year’s end. As Jon Rushton of Curzon explains, “We already had *Le Week-End*, *The Selfish Giant* and *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*. We just felt we had got as many good release dates as we were going to get from exhibition in this period. It was always going to be 2014 for *Ida*, but the awards corridor of January-February was a big no-no. There were big films coming out: the *American Hustles* of this world and *The Wolf of Wall Street*. The festival win was lovely, but wherever we put it, the win was to an extent going to be oldish news. In the end, we decided we could afford to put distance between *Ida* and the festival, and put it on a date before the 2014 LFF. Our challenge would be PR and whatever marketing money we had to bring it back to



The September issue: *Ida*

life, and actually it was fine. We were lucky that we had genuine critical acclaim, and you could position the film as a return to form for Pawel.”

The September strategy has worked for countless films (see chart, below), including Artificial Eye’s own *Fish Tank*, *Winter’s Bone*, *Melancholia* and *The Great Beauty*, all of which forfeited the chance to play in the London festival in favour of a release at this time.

Cannes competitor *Fish Tank* and *Winter’s Bone*, a Sundance premiere, instead had a UK showcase at Edinburgh: distributors would benefit from that festival once again becoming a strong platform for UK release. Rushton says, “The disadvantage of the LFF being so powerful – and the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages – is it’s one festival in October, and then you’re waiting for the next October. So Sundance London [in April], we did *Frank*, and Somerset House [where Film4 sponsor open-air screenings in August] we did the Dardennes’ *Two Days, One Night*. It’s obviously useful for a distributor if you have more than one festival you can genuinely launch a film at.”

SELECTED SEPTEMBER RELEASES, UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Blue Jasmine	2013	£5,273,695
Jane Eyre	2011	£5,076,087
Drive	2011	£3,041,525
I’ve Loved You So Long	2008	£1,223,827
The Great Beauty	2013	£1,000,997
Winter’s Bone	2010	£749,725
Fish Tank	2009	£599,282
Melancholia	2011	£583,366
Ida	2014	£318,271*
Holy Motors	2012	£243,320

*gross after 24 days

CONTROLLING INTEREST

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

Ira Sachs's inspiring career shows how cost control and smart fundraising can enable art to flourish



By Ben Roberts

As part of this year's London Film Festival, we decided to indulge ourselves. What were misleadingly described in the Industry

Programme as 'Meet the Commissioner' talks, were actually an opportunity for my Film Fund colleague Lizzie Francke and me, along with our opposite numbers at Film4 and BBC Films, to play the fan for an hour or so, talking to a visiting filmmaker we admired about their latest work.

The only rules were that we couldn't choose a film we had worked on, and it shouldn't be from the UK. The benefit to us and the audience – mostly aspiring British writers, directors and producers – would be a different take on international filmmaking from someone making a pretty good fist of it.

Lizzie spoke to Céline Sciamma about *Girlhood*, Film4's Anna Higgs spoke to David Robert Mitchell about *It Follows*, BBC Films' Joe Oppenheimer talked to casting director Jeanne McCarthy about *Foxcatcher*, and I got to sit down with American filmmaker Ira Sachs, whose *Love Is Strange* premiered in Sundance in January and received glowing reviews on its US release.

Love Is Strange, due in the UK in February, is a New York story about two older men, longtime partners and recently married, who find themselves temporarily separated when one loses his job and they lose their apartment.

One reason I wanted to talk to Ira about the film is that it's progressive in a number of ways: sexuality still presents practical and emotional hurdles, but is not itself the source of personal anxieties. Ben (John Lithgow) and George (Alfred Molina) are happy and settled, the centre of a supportive circle of family and friends. The film clearly reflects Ira's own circumstances, recently married and father of twins. He struck me as someone equally comfortable and purposeful in his personal and professional life.

Few in the audience had seen the film, so our conversation focused less on creative detail than on the business. In this respect Ira is remarkable. As an accessible but 'queer' filmmaker (he also curates the monthly *Queer/Art/Film* series at the IFC Centre in New York), his work has existed on the fringes, making financing a challenge.

His most expensive film has been *Married Life*, which cost around \$12 million and grossed a little over \$1.5 million. He said that was an eye-opener: he realised that to keep complete control of his

Ira Sachs describes himself as 'a good salesman' but he never promises an investor that they will make their money back



Love Is Strange: John Lithgow and Alfred Molina

work he had to accept that the financial value of his films was relatively modest – around \$1.5 million, in fact – and cut his coat accordingly.

After *Married Life* he made a \$2,000 short, *Last Address* – his "most watched" film, which brought him to the attention of many culturally engaged financiers. He raised the money for *Keep the Lights On* (around \$600,000) through a combination of Kickstarter and some 400 private angels, who were given a producer credit (associate, executive or producer) according to the level of their investment.

That's an impressive bit of fundraising. Ira describes himself as "a good salesman", but he never promises an investor that they will make their money back. As lead producer, he takes responsibility for his productions and his investors, and surrounds himself with frequent collaborators. He stays involved through the sales and marketing of his films, but knows when to "let it go" and hand over to the experts.

Keep the Lights On took only around \$250,000 at the box office; still, with a strong cast on his side and a network of financial supporters, Ira raised about \$1.7 million for *Love Is Strange* – valuing his work as he promised he would after *Married Life*.

On the back of a successful Sundance premiere, it sold to Sony Classics and international distributors (including Altitude, which won a bidding war for UK rights); the US box office is more than \$2 million, and his investors have made their money back – making it financially his most successful film so far.

I asked if he would like to work in TV, or make bigger-budgeted films (period, for example); an audience member asked if he would ever revisit any earlier, more expensive-to-shoot scripts. His answer to both was "no": he sees himself as an independent filmmaker, making films for cinema, in the spirit of Cassavetes, Fassbinder, Altman, Ken Loach. TV and studio work hold no interest for him because "if you direct for them, you work for them", and he wants to work for himself.

Is this indulgent? Unrealistic? I found it inspiring. "We don't have people like you," he said, referring to the lack of public film funding in the US. But the upshot is that he doesn't expect anyone to help him get his films made, and the hard work is all down to him. It's inspiring to see a filmmaker, faced with such significant challenges, staring them down and taking control. **@bfiben**

IN PRODUCTION

● **Corneliu Porumboiu**, the Romanian director of *12:08 East of Bucharest* and *Police, Adjective*, has started shooting his next project, *The Treasure*, which "follows two men as they face a series of misadventures in their quest to find a treasure". Filming will take place in Romania, in Bucharest and the county of Teleorman. No mention of the Sierra Madre...

● **Sammo Hung** is to return to directing 17 years after his last film. The martial arts film star, producer, choreographer and director, famed for work with Jackie Chan, Shaw Brothers, John Woo, Bruce Lee and many others, is making an action thriller, *The Bodyguard*, starring Hung himself as an amnesiac retired soldier who gets involved in a war between Chinese and Russian gangs.

● **Danny Boyle** has reportedly snagged Christian Bale to play Steve Jobs in *Jobs*, his biopic of the late Apple chief. Jobs's life has already been put on screen in 2013's poorly received *Jobs*, which starred Ashton Kutcher, but Boyle's project sounds more promising, boasting as it does a script by *The Social Network* screenwriter Aaron Sorkin.

● **Hugh Hudson**, the British director of *Chariots of Fire* and *Revolution*, is filming his next feature, *Altamira*, on location in northern Spain. The film tells the story of the discovery in 1879 of the prehistoric cave paintings at the now world-famous Altamira cave; the cast includes Antonio Banderas, Rupert Everett and Golshifteh Farahani.

● **Jacques Audiard** has started production on his seventh feature, *Erran*. Details are scarce, but Audiard is directing from his own script, and the story is rumoured to be about a Sri Lankan Tamil fighter living as a refugee in France, and working as a caretaker on a rough estate in the Paris suburbs. The story – partly inspired by Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) – will focus on culture shock and the refugee's perception of modern-day French society.

● **Quentin Tarantino** (below) is preparing to start shooting his Wyoming-set western *The Hateful Eight* this month. According to the official synopsis, the film "follows the steadily ratcheting tension that develops after a blizzard diverts a stagecoach from its route, and traps a pitiless and mistrustful group that includes a competing pair of bounty hunters, a renegade Confederate soldier, and a female prisoner in a saloon in the middle of nowhere". The latest addition to the cast is

Jennifer Jason Leigh, who joins other rumoured cast members Samuel L. Jackson, Kurt Russell, Tim Roth, Michael Madsen and Bruce Dern. The film is due out in late 2015.





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INTELLIGENT DESIGN

THE CREATION OF 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

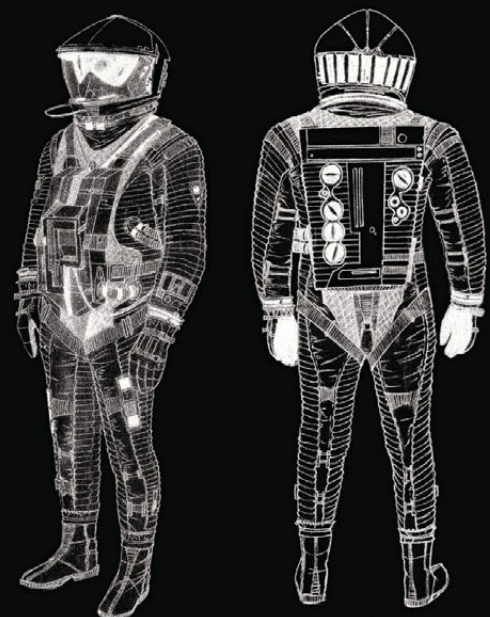
Stanley Kubrick was determined the design for his 'definitive attempt' at the science-fiction film should represent a decisive break with Hollywood norms – and who better to enlist to his cause than a pair of spacecraft consultants poached from the very heart of NASA itself?

By Christopher Frayling

Stanley Kubrick's first choice of production designer for 'Journey Beyond the Stars' (as *2001: A Space Odyssey* was then called) was Ken Adam. Kubrick and Adam had developed a very intense working relationship on *Dr. Strangelove*, which was released at the end of January 1964. The two key sets in the film – the Pentagon War Room with its giant poker table and the detailed two-tier interior of the B-52 bomber – had attracted an unusual amount of critical attention. So, at the end of July 1964, Kubrick wrote to Adam, asking if he would consider designing his next film project. Adam was very busy at the time with *The Ipcress File* and preparations for *Thunderball* and besides could not "be expected to accept blindly a very important position on a most difficult project, which I know would require all my resources and ingenuity". He was concerned that with "all kinds of research at your disposal" and the input of specialists from NASA there "would not be any room left for my imagination". Kubrick was already envisaging a realistic science-fiction epic to be based on the latest discoveries; a fictional semi-documentary on a colossal scale, preferably to be shown on the widest screen there was. The wild expressionism of *Dr. Strangelove* could scarcely be further from his intentions. So Adam politely declined. Kubrick took this badly.

But before he wrote to Adam, in May 1964, he had also corresponded with the Hollywood matte painter and illustrator Chesley Bonestell, letting him know about 'Journey Beyond the Stars': "I am presently working with [author] Arthur Clarke [since April

THE MAN IN THE RED SUIT
Keir Dullea as Dr Dave Bowman in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (right); and concept designs by Harry Lange for the spacesuits and helmets used in the film (below)



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According to Arthur C. Clarke, where space movies were concerned, Kubrick was 'highly critical of everything', always noting the poor quality of the design and special effects

1964] on an idea for a science-fiction film, which might prove to be the definitive attempt. I am, as you might well imagine, enormously impressed by the imagination and quality of your work. This is just a note to... find out how to get in touch with you when the time comes."

Kubrick and Clarke had been viewing as many 'space movies' as they could lay their hands on in New York, including *Destination Moon* (1950) and *Conquest of Space* (1955), both of which Bonestell had designed. Bonestell had also illustrated a very influential eight-part series of articles for *Collier's* magazine, beginning in March 1952, on the possibilities of space exploration, with much of the promotional text provided by Dr Wernher von Braun. *Collier's* had a huge circulation and it has been claimed of these articles that "no artist had more impact on the emerging popular culture of space than Chesley Bonestell". According to Clarke, where the diet of space movies was concerned, Kubrick was "highly critical of everything", always noting the poor quality of the design and special effects and the puerility of the scripts. But *Destination Moon* did capture his attention. As, it seems, did Bonestell's celebrated illustration of a large circular revolving space station in *Collier's*. Although Bonestell replied, "I would be glad to discuss it [the design of the project] with you at any time," the correspondence ended in August 1964. Kubrick kept reproductions of Bonestell's paintings from the book *The Conquest of Space* among his pre-production notes, and had a 35mm print of *Destination Moon* shipped over to MGM studios at Borehamwood in September 1965. But, as Arthur C. Clarke noted, the research context had changed beyond all recognition since the mid-1950s, the heyday of space boosterism. Manned space flights had been happening in the real world since 1961. "We were interested in starting where *Destination Moon* finished," he wrote.

THE ART OF SCIENCE

On 7 September 1964, shortly after Kubrick wrote to Adam and Bonestell, he produced a "100-item questionnaire about our astronauts, eg do they sleep in their pajamas, what do they eat for breakfast, etc." 'Journey Beyond the Stars' would represent a decisive break with the usual Hollywood ways of doing these things. It would present technological and scientific change within conceivable limits – designing a plausible future for filmgoers who could well live to see it – and would have to work punishingly hard to do so. Unlike earlier mainstream science-fiction films, it would not attempt to break the continuity of history: on the contrary, it would deliberately mix the familiar (brands and products – to Western eyes anyway) with the speculative. It would be obsessively detailed – not with scientific verisimilitude as an end in itself, but as an aesthetic strategy. It would create a visual world out of material things that had never been seen in public quite like this before (except, occasionally, at world's fairs). Instead of Bonestell's moonscape of jagged mountains and parched mudflat surfaces, it would feature rounded mountains and rubble – which is what they really looked like, according to the latest photographs supplied by the Department of Astronomy at the University of Manchester and by the Soviet science attaché at the London embassy; these were the clearest available images before the moon landing in 1969.

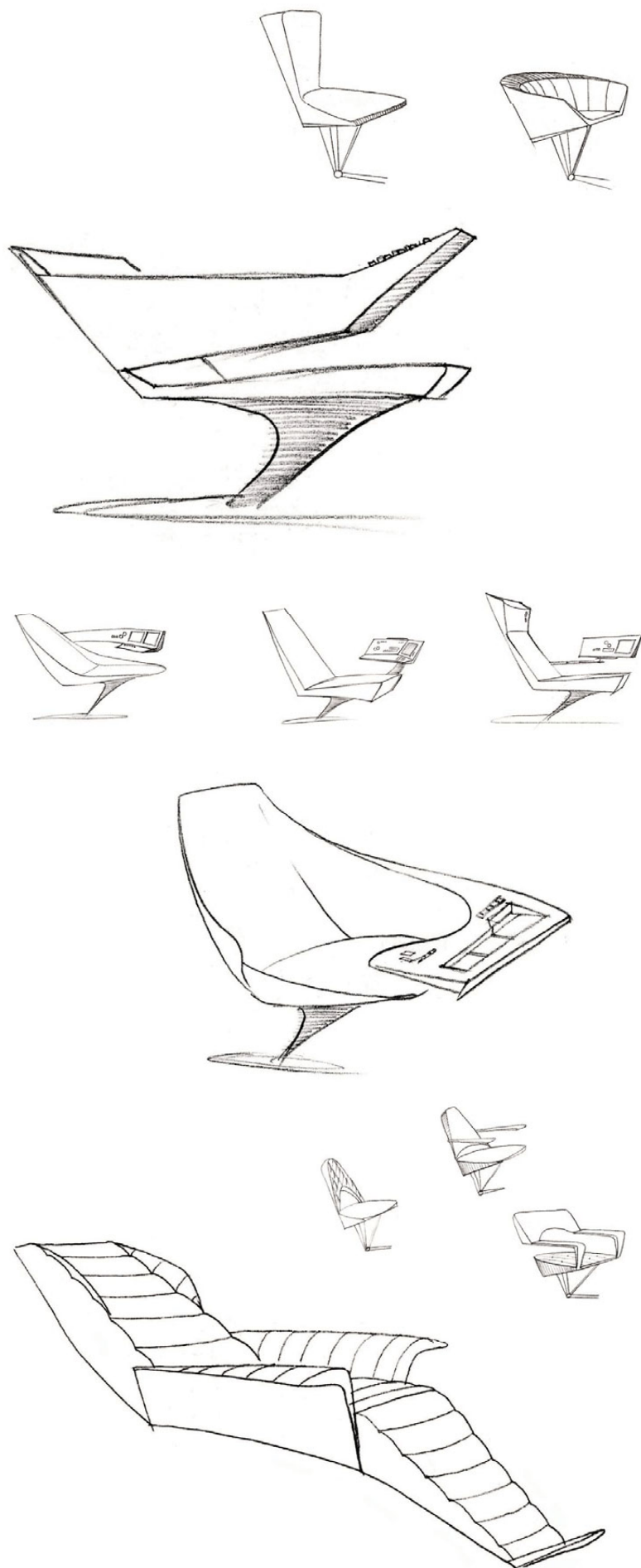
Enter Frederick I. Ordway III and Harry (Hans-Kurt) Lange, who happened to be in New York in January 1965 for talks with publishers about their latest book project and for a conference on astronautics. They both worked for the NASA George C. Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama – Ordway on the communications and networking side, liaising between the predominantly German rocket scientists, business and government; Lange as an illustrator of advanced spacecraft concepts for future projects graphics. Dr von Braun, their boss, used Lange's clever visualisations to help elicit funding from Washington: "Harry," he once said, "your work makes money where everybody else spends it." As Lange himself put it, "I made them to be as dramatic as possible – to take to appropriation committees." Ordway and Lange had also set up in the mid-1950s, with some colleagues, the grand-sounding General Aeronautics Research Corporation, intended to produce publications and consultancy: Ordway the words, Lange the pictures.

On 22 January 1965, they contacted Ordway's friend Arthur C. Clarke in New York, met him at the Harvard Club, and mentioned that they were working together on a book project *Intelligence in the Universe*. Ordway recalls: "That's when he mentioned that he was working with director Stanley Kubrick on a film which aimed to be the science-fiction film, one which would be serious, scientifically plausible and big budget. It would involve other intelligences in space..."

Clarke contacted Kubrick and the four men met in the director's penthouse on East 84th Street the following afternoon. "We took along the galleys and the pictures and I told him that I'd been working with von Braun at NASA and that this was a little sideline here," says Ordway.

After a "mentally exhilarating" conversation that ranged across rocket science, ballistic missiles, computers and aliens, according to Lange, Kubrick studied his pictures closely, looked him in the eye and announced: "Well, I can get better illustrators in New York City a dime a dozen, but they don't have your NASA background, your combination. That's what I need."

Lange did not take offence. He flew back with Ordway to Huntsville five days later, with a confidential copy of Clarke's long treatment of 'Journey Beyond the Stars' in his luggage. An airmail, by special delivery, soon arrived confirming that Kubrick wanted to make a deal with General Aeronautics for the services of both men. By February it was clear that this would involve at least 80 per cent of their time, and with von Braun's blessing they signed a six-month contract with Polaris Films of 239 Central Park West. Ordway would provide scientific advice and would liaise with his network of corporate and government contacts in space and computer research (the Kubrick Archive contains 300 files on product development alone): a number of big corporations had exhibited at the New York World's Fair, which opened on the same day as Clarke first met Kubrick, 22 April 1964, and the film made use of several of them. Lange would design the space vehicles, environments and space suits. A typically robust request for technical help with some of the film's designs, written by publicity director/vice-president of Polaris Roger Caras a few months after Ordway and Lange had been signed up, tried hard to distance the project from the usual clichés of 'science fiction': "The film will operate without the



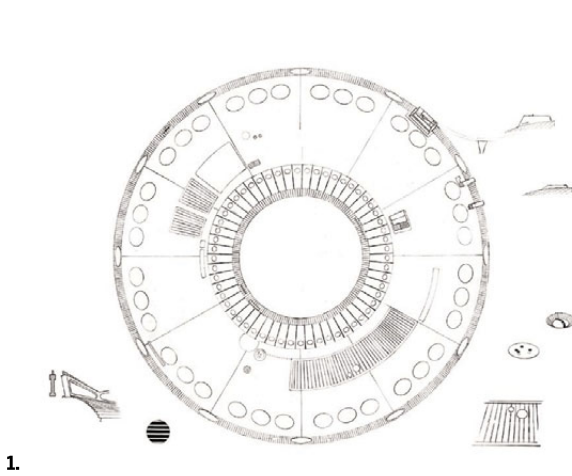
assistance of Mickey Mouse, Buck Rogers, Russian spies, Jack Armstrong the All-American Boy [a radio and movie serial adventure hero], moths, butterflies and bumblebees destroying cities and raping Japanese women. In short [the film] will be a logical extension of today's rapidly developing techniques and technologies."

Lange started serious work on the design of the six main vehicles featured in the treatment in February 1965. They were the Orion III earth-to-orbit shuttle; Space Station One (later V) in orbit around the earth; the Aries 1B earth-orbit-to-lunar surface spacecraft; the lunar surface bus used to move people and materials; the large Discovery One interplanetary spaceship and its small round (originally rectangular) Space Pods "with extendable arms" for maintenance and local exploration. Work was also underway on a friendly, female-voiced computer called Athena (later the more malign HAL) and spacewear for scientists on the moon and astronauts aboard Discovery. By April, according to Clarke's log, "the walls [of the Polaris office] are getting covered with impressive pictures..."

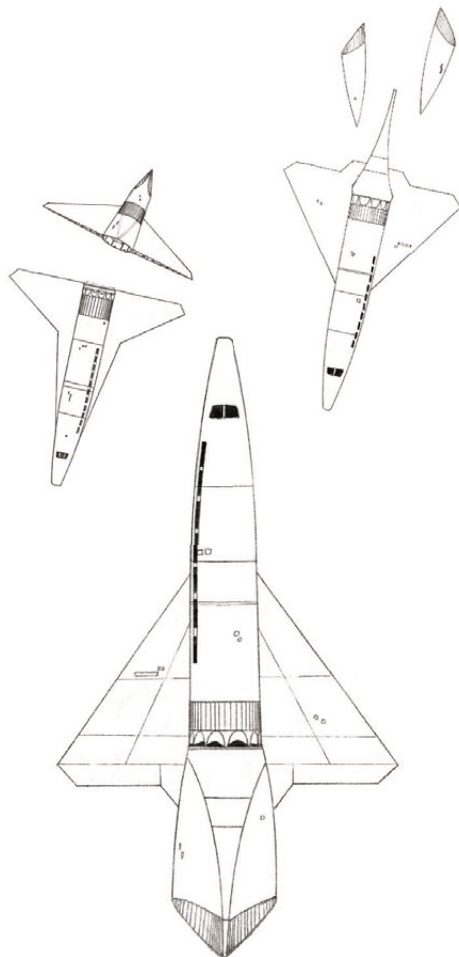
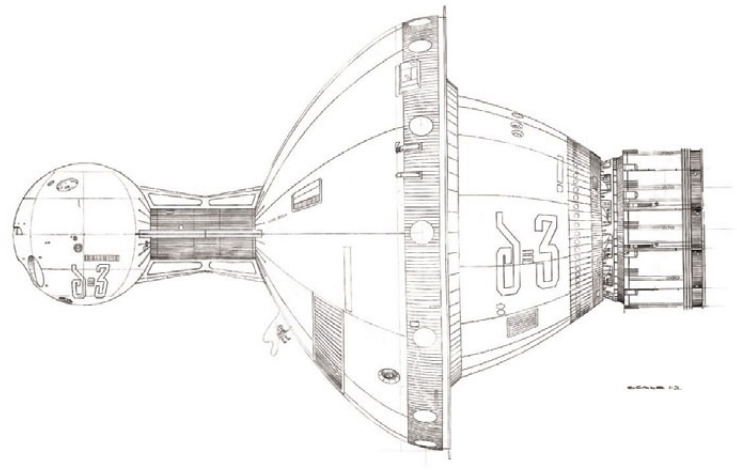
Lange recalled that these had to be both detailed and rigorously defensible: "A lot of other people would have thought, 'Well, we'll just have a little black panel there and paint it black, and then stick some blue squares on it, that's it, you make one or two of them light up.' But that's for television, and they can get away



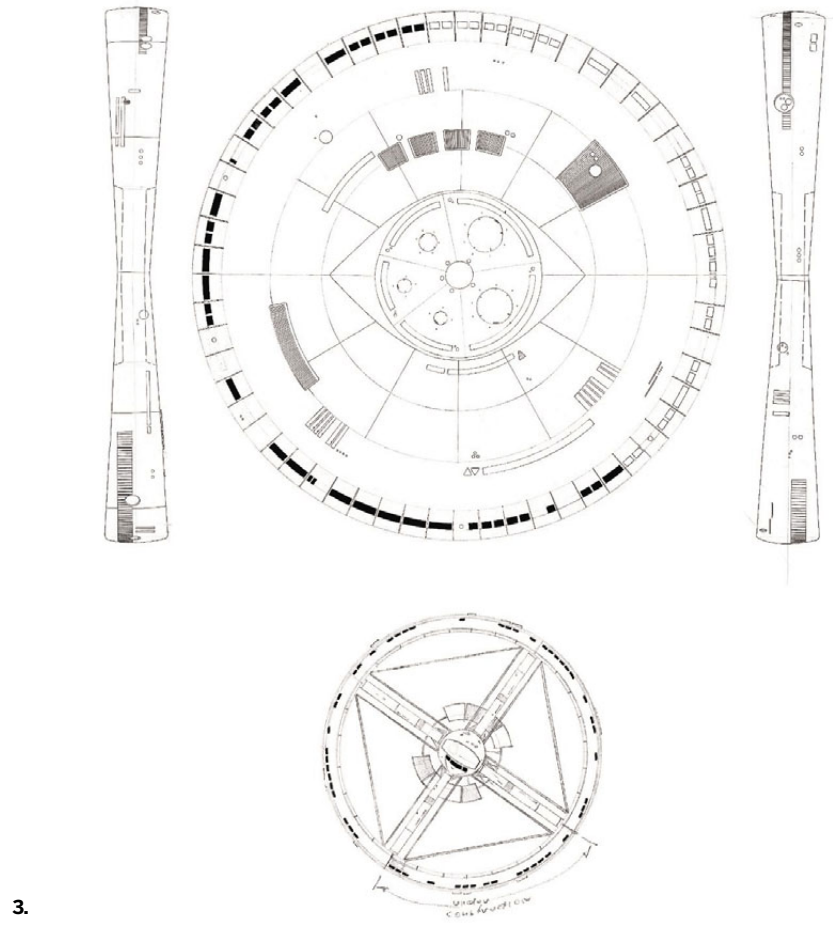
SITTING PRETTY
Chair concepts for the Orion III space shuttle, showing details of the arm rest console (left) by production designer Harry Lange (opposite); the chairs as seen in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (above)



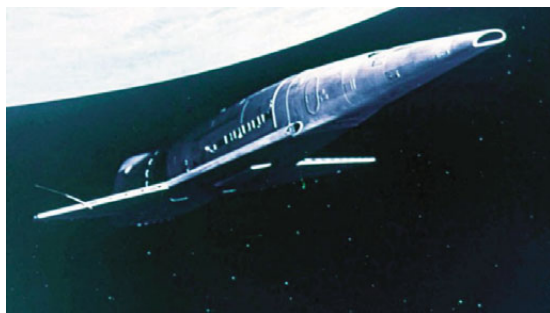
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STATION TO STATION
 1. A concept drawing of the side view and cross section of the Command Module
 2. Early concept drawings for the Orion III space shuttle
 3. The final design for Space Station V, including side elevations
 4. The Orion III space shuttle in 2001: A Space Odyssey
 5. Space Station V as seen in the film

with it because it's a little bitty screen; but this was Cinerama, the wraparound, and you don't get away with it. It had to be absolutely perfect and Stanley was a great stickler for detail."

This was an understatement. Large would produce "small thumbnail sketches", which he would discuss with Kubrick, then more sketches, then semi-developed drawings – still with plenty of options – and finally, or almost finally, detailed technical specifications and in some cases paintings. Kubrick would often ask him to work on visual ideas even though he was pretty sure he did not like them – because only by actually seeing Lange's drawings could he make up his mind.

What did Kubrick feel about working with such close associates of von Braun, one of whom was German? After all, Dr. Strangelove, as played so memorably by Peter Sellers, had in many ways been a wheelchair-bound caricature of von Braun. Peter George's novelisation of the screenplay – then recently published – was in no doubt about this. Sellers was to state categorically, "It was always Wernher von Braun", and Ken Adam confirms it. He should know: the two men went to the same school in Berlin in the 1920s. Ordway recalls: "Of course, Kubrick was Jewish and Harry would come in with Germanic clothes sometimes. There was a time when he even wore Bavarian jackets! But they got along fine. Stanley would sometimes say to me, 'Well I don't think I ever imagined I'd be working this close to a German'."

For obvious reasons, there would be no more gags about von Braun and involuntary Nazi salutes – even if Lange did sometimes come to work looking like Baron von Trapp.

Tony Masters arrived in New York in April 1965, to head up the art department, in the same month as the change of title to *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Kubrick had asked Ken Adam at the beginning of February to recommend a list of British production designers who had a proven track-record in organising complex productions, running a large budget and understanding the technologies of filmmaking: "If the stress must be on the creative or the other elements [technical and cost] I think I would prefer the technical side... Keep in mind the personality of the old maestro and how it might mesh with your choices."

Masters had worked on *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* and (uncredited) for David Lean on *Lawrence of Arabia*. From April onwards, all Lange's designs would be submitted through him, and under his management put into highly coloured pictorial formats – sci-fi cover-art style – by the illustrators Richard McKenna and Roy Carnon. As Ordway remembers, "Harry had the ultimate design of all the space elements – because he had the experience of working in that area." Masters acknowledged that "Harry put the authenticity into it", and that when they were all working together as a team, they began to design within his visual idiom.

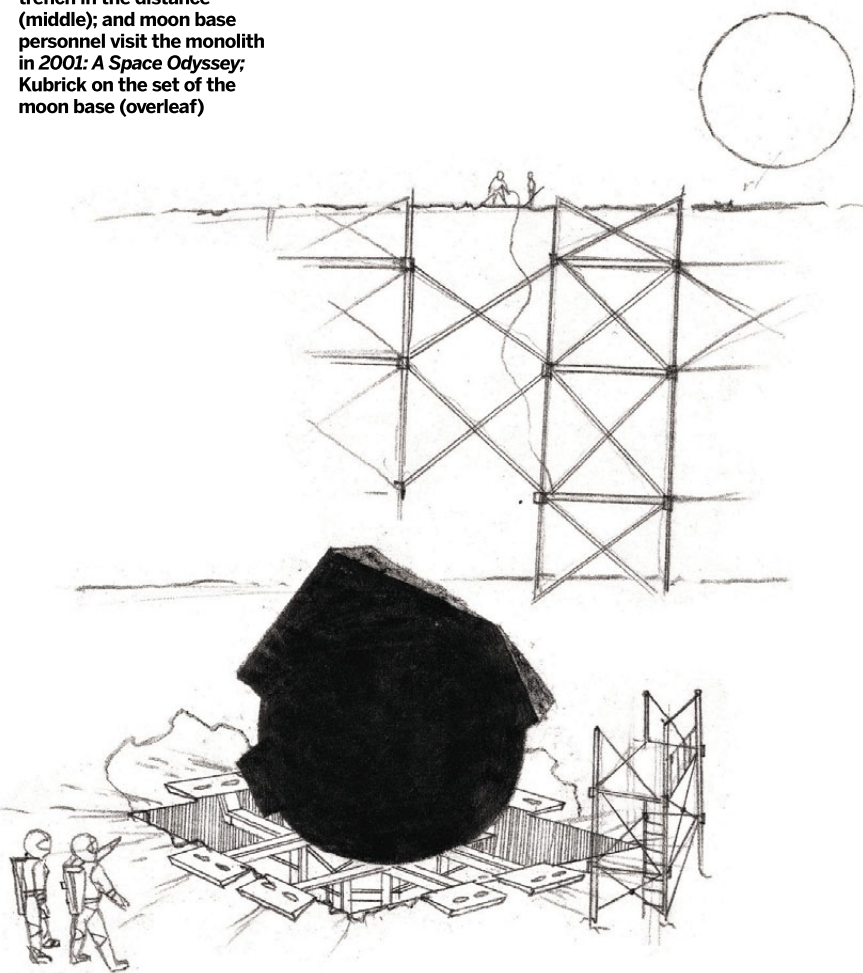
One problem was that Lange had never designed for a film before. "I was not a professional," he later admitted, "I was a spacecraft designer, visualisation expert, whatever you want to call it. I certainly knew nothing [at the outset] about how to... make it into a film set."

The presence of Masters in New York, two months in, helped him through this brave new world of film, as did Kubrick's persistence as "a good taskmaster".

Eventually, over at Borehamwood, the director

A TRIP TO THE MOON

An early concept design by Harry Lange for the monolith (top); an early Lange sketch of the moon base and moon bus, with the excavated trench in the distance (middle); and moon base personnel visit the monolith in 2001: A Space Odyssey; Kubrick on the set of the moon base (overleaf)





The production designer Harry Lange certainly brought authenticity to the project – some of his drawings may well have been submitted for security clearance to NASA

managed to persuade the union – not easy to do – to allow Lange the credit ‘production designer’, on the grounds that by then he had served his time for two years. Ordway remained happy to be billed as ‘scientific consultant’.

Lange certainly brought authenticity to the project. Ordway confirms that some of his drawings may well have been submitted for security clearance to NASA, based as they were on classified information – and this was, after all, still at the height of the Cold War. He brought a ‘look’ as well: clinical, ice-cool, eggshell white rather than the shiny steel of traditional sci-fi rockets. He tended to deny, in interviews, that this was a matter of styling. Design in space films, he always said, was about purpose and function, and “only out of that comes a style of its own”. Beauty was a by-product. But he did concede that part of the job was to make the vehicles, interiors and spacesuits *look* functional and ‘technical’, involving choices about what would work best on the screen. The results have since been called ‘Project Modernism’. Kubrick put it differently: “I think there were two problems with the design of anything [in *2001*]. One was, ‘Is there anything about it that would be logically inconsistent with what people felt would actually exist?’ and the other one was, ‘Would it be interesting? Would it look nice?’”

By the time of the move to MGM Borehamwood – Lange in July 1965, Ordway in August – much of the design work on the vehicles had been completed, ready for the model-making shops and set builders. The six-month contract was turning into two years plus. There were still some important design decisions to be made, especially about the second half of the film. Would *Discovery* be powered by nuclear propulsion? Would her destination be Jupiter or Saturn? How much emphasis would there be on the ‘hibernaculum’ in space? Would there be a sequence set at the World Space Center in New York, involving establishing shots of the street? Would Bowman descend into a Stargate on Jupiter V and find himself in an extraterrestrial civilisation? Some of these were being actively debated only weeks before the start of filming on 29 December 1965. But the bulk of the vehicle and spacesuit designs were created between February and July 1965. They had to be...

When it was all over, early in 1967, Ordway returned to his full-time job at NASA, while Lange decided to stay in England and continue as a designer for film, specialising in space hardware (*The Empire Strikes Back*, *The Return of the Jedi*, *Moonraker*). Robert O’Brien, the amazingly patient head of MGM, summarised the *2001* saga in a famous *Variety* interview: “Why have Buck Rogers for six million dollars, when you can have Stanley Kubrick for seven million dollars?” In point of fact, the film cost \$10.5 million, of which an estimated \$6.5 million was spent on “artefacts and sets and camerawork and special effects photography”. Von Braun was reported to be pleased with the result. 

i Thanks to the Stanley Kubrick Archive, Sir Ken Adam and the late Fred Ordway. Christopher Frayling’s *The 2001 File: Harry Lange and the Design of the Landmark Science Fiction Film* – featuring Lange’s unpublished archive of drawings – will be published by Reel Art Press in March 2015. *2001: A Space Odyssey* is rereleased by the BFI in UK cinemas on 28 November.

DAVID AND HIS GOLIATHS

In this extract from an essay in ‘Sight & Sound’ in spring 1966, ‘Two for the sci-fi’, David Robinson describes Kubrick’s tireless perfectionism, which he observed during a visit to the set of ‘2001: A Space Odyssey’

The sets spectacularly monopolise most of the stages at MGM Elstree studios... The space lounge set is almost 150 feet long; and the floor is constructed in an arc which gives strange, giddy effects if you attempt to walk up or down it. There are moon-stations and spacecraft of equally daunting scale. The most staggering set constructed for the film is, however, the great centrifuge, designed and built for the film by Vickers Armstrong. It looks rather like a fairground big wheel of exceptional bulk, heavily studded with arc lights and back projection devices and festooned with swags of cable. The wheel itself stands 36 feet high – half as tall again, roughly, as the rooftop of a reasonably sized two-storey house. The working area of the set is the inner part of the wheel or drum, which can be rotated in either direction at a pretty fair pace. This operation is quite alarming. Movement is at all times heralded by a warning hooter of eerie pitch and piercing volume; and the wheel picks up speed with disconcerting muted creaks and grunts. Clearly it could be dangerous; and to add to the menace of the thing, the technicians who work inside it wear heavy crash helmets. The actors are not so protected.

Kubrick at work on his stages has rather the air of a David embattled with several Goliaths, or, perhaps, Quixote tilting at the windmills. Sometimes the machines seem to be getting the upper hand. Shooting was held up for nearly a fortnight because the centrifuge, it seemed, simply *would* not be finished. But if Kubrick seems to be battling with his machinery, it is at least a contest of his own setting-up; and probably one that excites and extends him.

Kubrick, currently wearing a beard, looks rather like Orson Welles playing a short man, or else Buñuel’s younger brother. On the set he is quiet, severe, giving an impression of being rather forbearing than actually patient (which is his reputation) and keeping himself, for the most part, to himself. It seems no accident that he has an assistant director of NCO firmness. The *New York Times Magazine* made great play of the “awe” in which his collaborators hold him; and you feel that this is the sort of relationship that

he encourages. Only occasional small jokes break the intensity of his concentration and suggest that his work actually gives him pleasure. In between attending to everything else, he is forever snatching up a Polaroid camera and snapping off photographs, some apparently for immediate reference, but others, it seems, simply as stills.

His attention to detail is legendary, and extends from close control over every technical aspect to minute observations of the actors' presence and performance. A scene with William Sylvester, already meticulously set up and rehearsed, was reshot several times because Kubrick was not happy with the way the moisture in the corner of the actor's eye glistened; and then again reshot because Kubrick felt that Sylvester gave an inflection that was vaguely British to a line of very little importance.

Actors speak highly of Kubrick, and there is no doubt that their performances may often owe much to his care for detail in directing them. It must also be fairly gruelling at times. Another scene I watched required a supporting player to address a scientific congress. The lines set down for him were already trying enough: "In this stressful environment for HAL, we suspect that your threat of disconnection might have been the proverbial last straw. HAL had not known unconsciousness since his operational acceptance. This might have seemed for him the equivalent of death as we know it..."

Constant reiteration under Kubrick's fierce eye rapidly reduced the actor to a terrible series of fluffed deliveries, not helped by Kubrick's progressive revisions of the lines during rehearsals, or by his rather unconvincing reassurances. ("Cut it... Pretty nice though... Now you're doing sump'n funny with your eyes... Now you're getting a bit public speakerish... Now you sound a little sad... Wanna try it again?... You sound like you're reading a eulogy. Very sombre. Just keep it factual, casual.. Just try it once more without the camera...")

Kubrick in fact appears happiest when faced with a direct technical challenge; and *2001* provides him with several. As one instance, the space suits devised for Keir Dullea and Gary Lockwood have to have their own air supply; and when the actors are in them, only Kubrick can communicate with them through two-way transmitters fixed in the suits. Despite the immediate difficulties, Kubrick looks appreciably gayer directing on the centrifuge stage, imposing as it does quite exceptional working conditions. There is only room for the actors and the camera inside the set, so the director and the main technical unit must sit inside a sort of cage at some distance from the set, watching on the monitor... and communicating with the actors and



Wheel of fortune: 2001's centrifuge on the set at MGM Elstree studios

Only occasional small jokes break the intensity of Kubrick's concentration and suggest his work actually gives him pleasure

cameraman by microphones and headsets.

The day I watched Kubrick on set he was shooting a scene in which Gary Lockwood was doing track exercises around the inside rim of the centrifuge. The set-up required that as the wheel moved round, Lockwood ran in the opposite direction so as to maintain his position on one spot; while the camera was moved so as also to keep in position a little

ahead of him. Since the camera was shooting on its side, the effect was that the camera was tracking back around a (comparatively speaking) stationary centrifuge, to show Lockwood running around the *side*, holding to the floor by the centrifugal force of the vehicle's movement in space. The effect, heightened by the strains of a Chopin waltz (shades of *Strangelove*) played by Kubrick on a small portable player, was unexpectedly comic on the screen. Kubrick was evidently fascinated by the prospects of editing this material and seeing the effects of conventional cutting with such a set-up. ⑨

i To read more in the S&S and MFB archive, visit bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/subscribe



Master and commander: Kubrick with Keir Dullea on the set



JUSTICE IS BLIND
Kolia (Alexsey Serebryakov)
suffers a series of
unwarranted misfortunes
in Andrey Zvyagintsev's
Leviathan, earning him
comparisons with the long-
suffering Job in the bible



HERE BE MONSTERS

'Leviathan', Andrey Zvyagintsev's tense drama about a man struggling to save his family home from a tyrannical mayor in a village on the Barents Sea, offers a savage portrait of the corruption and lawlessness endemic in contemporary Russian society

By Ian Christie

Leviathan has appeared in many guises down the ages. After a striking debut as a biblical monster in the Book of Job, it doubles as Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and provides the arresting title of Thomas Hobbes's 17th-century treatise on political theory. Later, and more literally, it's Melville's great whale, the hero of countless comics and pop songs, and even the title of a novel by Paul Auster. But just what kind of monster is it in Andrey Zvyagintsev's imposing fourth feature?

There are certainly whales, both in Russia's Arctic Barents Sea and on its debris-strewn coast, which is the film's setting. But this is not a tale of hardy fisherfolk, even if one of the main characters works in a cannery. As in all of Zvyagintsev's films, its focus is on a tightly knit web of troubled family relations.

Kolia meets his friend off the train; a friend who once served under him in the army, we learn, but who is now a seemingly successful lawyer in Moscow. Dmitri has come to help Kolia in the final stage of his legal battle to keep hold of the wooden house that has been in his family for generations and overlooks the town.

The battle has almost certainly already been lost, however, as Dmitri warns Kolia before a court appearance of farcical formality. The town's mayor, a bloated tyrant, has his eye on the site for his own corrupt purposes, so no appeal to law or sentiment is likely to succeed – unless, that is, Dmitri can dish enough dirt on the mayor to force a deal, and then manage to survive the consequences. Meanwhile Kolia's younger wife, stepmother to his rebellious son, watches warily as the stakes escalate.

A family apparently at peace, but still disturbed by unhealed traumas from the past is what we've come to expect from Zvyagintsev. In his haunting debut, *The Return* (2003), a long-absent father took his sons on a mysterious trip to the coast; while in *The Banishment* (2007), set in a composite, deliberately non-specific landscape, a man and woman struggle after her confession of infidelity. With his third film, *Elena* (2011), Zvyagintsev moved closer to the social reality of contemporary Russia, as a woman is driven to murder her wealthy husband in order to secure an inheritance for her son from a previous relationship. *Leviathan* manages, more successfully, to balance the universality the director has always striven for with a brilliantly etched microcosm of the lawlessness that grips Russia today, where patronage, power and profiteering are closely intertwined.

Zvyagintsev has already suffered (and probably



benefited too) from the near-inevitable comparisons with Tarkovsky. Stately, 'slow' by some standards, and relentlessly solemn, his films propose serious themes. These are definitely more Dostoevskian than Chekhovian, and indeed the director has obligingly quoted the author of *Crime and Punishment* at a festival screening of *Leviathan*: "Only through the fantastic can you get to the depth of truth." In fact, there seems relatively little fantasy in the tightly wound plotting of the new film, which shows just how terrifyingly anarchic even the farthest corners of Russia can be today. The mayor meets his clients and berates his underlings beneath a portrait of Putin, just as his predecessors in the Soviet era would have done beneath a portrait of Lenin, Stalin or Brezhnev.

The autocratic power he wields is also similar to that of his forerunners, and there are echoes in *Leviathan* of some brave older challenges to Soviet complacency, such as Abdrashitov's *A Train Has Stopped* (1982) and Klimov's *Farewell* (1983). The wall of provincial silence that Abdrashitov's investigator meets after a train crash and Klimov's elegy for a village about to be flooded in the name of progress both prefigure the closed, hierarchical world portrayed in *Leviathan*. Except, as Zvyagintsev has said in an interview with Anne Thompson, the current situation may be harder to fathom and to fight: "Imagine a situation where I work for a firm which belongs to a larger holding group which belongs to a certain person in turn. I don't need to be told how to vote. I automatically assume my vote has to align with whatever the wishes are of the larger thing that ultimately I belong to."

What happens when individuals resist the pressure to bow to corrupt local officialdom was also the theme of Boris Khlebnikov's ironically titled *A Long and Happy Life* (2013), similarly filmed in the far north, near Murmansk. There, an idealistic city-dweller takes over the running of a former collective farm and appears to win the support of his workers when the call comes to sell out, only to discover that everyone has their price in today's Russia. But here, some caution is needed. Anyone trying to diagnose the state of Putin's Russia from a handful of films should pause and reflect how reliably, for instance, Britain's cinema portrays the moral and political climate of the country.

There is indeed much more to *Leviathan* than its portrayal of cronyism and the misuse of public power – which is far from unique to post-Soviet Russia. One aspect, however, which is defiantly Russian is the institution of a hunting trip as a barely disguised excuse to do some serious drinking. Celebrated in Aleksandr Rogozh-



The tightly wound plot of 'Leviathan' shows just how terrifyingly anarchic the farthest corners of Russia can be today

kin's domestic hit comedy *Peculiarities of the National Hunt* (1995) and its sequels, this custom provides *Leviathan* with both an episode of wry comedy, when one of the 'hunters' opens up with an automatic assault rifle, and the framing of the emotional vortex that will tear Kolia's fragile family apart.

Less familiar – indeed conspicuously missing from most recent Russian films – is the growing importance of the Orthodox church in contemporary Russia. The church makes a number of appearances throughout *Leviathan* and plays a more complex role than some critics have implied. Certainly the senior cleric we see as a confidant of the mayor seems not only to be comfortable with earthly power but to embody the conservative vision of 'holy Russia' that lashed out after the 2012 Pussy Riot protest in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, itself a showcase for the new church-state alliance. There's a distant echo of the great confrontation between Eisenstein's Tsar Ivan and his former friend Kolychev, now a disapproving archbishop, when Zvyagintsev's mayor bows to the bishop's insistence on being guided by God in his affairs. But there is also another aspect of the church's presence in this depressed village, perhaps reflecting the director's own professed faith. As Kolia's woes multiply, he encounters a priest buying bread in the local supermarket, apparently to distribute to the poor, and this – distinctly Dostoevskian – encounter reinforces the film's underlying theme.

Zvyagintsev's intriguing title, we are told, is both a reference to the sea-monster evoked by God in his final speech to Job, and to Hobbes's defence of the social contract, written during the English Civil War. Kolia, suffering a series of unwarranted misfortunes, has been compared to a latter-day Job, although this analogy seems sketchy at best. The core idea of an ordinary citizen driven to desperate measures by injustice seems to draw on a combination of Heinrich von Kleist's novella *Michael Kohlhaas*, based on the true story of a 16th-century German rebel against authority, and the real-life tale of Marvin Heemeyer, described by Zvyagintsev as "a Colorado man who was a welder and owned an automotive repair shop, who went on a rampage with a tractor in 2004 after the local authorities gave permission to construct a factory that blocked the entrance to his shop. He bulldozed the town hall, the factory and other buildings, then killed himself."

Kolia behaves neither like Job, Kohlhaas nor Heemeyer, indicating that these were only starting points for a story that is certainly not confined to any single culture – it fuels Jia Zhangke's explosive *A Touch of Sin*, an-

FAMILY AFFAIRS

In his previous films – (from left) *The Return* (2003), *The Banishment* (2007) and *Elena* (2011) – director Andrey Zvyagintsev (above) explored families who are seemingly at peace, but still disturbed by past traumas



BE NATIONAL ARCHIVE (3)



other recent protest against corrupt power – but which Zvyagintsev and his co-writer Oleg Negin have given a strong sense of Russian abjection. And of all the references invoked, the most relevant is surely Hobbes's argument that only “that great Leviathan called a common-wealth or state” in which all play their part responsibly, can protect the individual from a life that is otherwise, in the famous phrase, “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”.

The succession of Zvyagintsev's titles alone points to an eschatological bent and a Tarkovskian desire to create parables. The father of *The Return* is rhymed visually with Mantegna's *The Dead Christ*, while the title of *The Banishment* refers to Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and in it there are two Leonardo references – a jigsaw puzzle of *The Annunciation*, and a photograph of the drawing of St Anne and Mary, which Zvyagintsev drew attention to in an interview with James Norton as one “I'm unhappy that nobody has so far noticed”. *Elena*, apparently standing apart from this theme, was originally devised in response to an invitation to contribute to a group of films dealing with apocalypse – so we may per-

haps read it as a kind of domestic apocalypse, in which the wife destroys the family in order to save it.

Leviathan once again asks us to think beyond the film's narrative, to ponder the allegorical allusions (encouraged by the poster image, showing a whale's skeleton on a beach), and no doubt to see Kolia and his family as tragic victims of a corrupt polity. But Zvyagintsev is less a philosopher or a social critic – the film received state funding and has been cleared for release in Russia, despite recent legislation against swearing that seemed to threaten it – than a powerful director of actors and creator of incomparable filmic landscapes. All the actors in *Leviathan* are outstanding, with the central four – Alexsey Serebryakov as the increasingly tormented Kolia, Vladimir Vdovichenkov as his friend Dmitri, Elena Lyadova as Lilya and Roman Madyanov as the bullying mayor Vadim – surrounded by a larger cast of supporting players than hitherto in Zvyagintsev's work.

After the elaborate artificiality of *The Banishment* and the predominantly urban realist setting of *Elena*, *Leviathan* comes back to the elemental landscape and post-industrial seashore of *The Return* and, crucially, to the houses that have been at the heart of his vision. Kolia's wooden house is the centre of his life and a link with Russia's past, now being destroyed in pursuit of profit and ostentation. We know that *The Sacrifice* is one of Zvyagintsev's key referents, with its focus on an archetypal house, but there are many other domestic spaces that make 'home' a central Tarkovskian theme. With Kolia's embattled home at the visual, emotional and political centre of *Leviathan*, Zvyagintsev has created a film that may speak as eloquently to his fellow Russians as Tarkovsky's *Mirror* once did, and its final fate may serve as an apt metaphor for the condition of that enigmatic land. 📍



Leviathan is released in UK cinemas on 7 November and is reviewed on page 77

CORRUPTION AND DECAY
(Clockwise from top left) Roman Madyanov as the bullying mayor Vadim in *Leviathan*; Sergey Pokhodaev as Kolia's teenage son Roma surveying the remains of a whale; Elena Lyadova as Lilya; and the film's village location in Russia



CONVERSATION

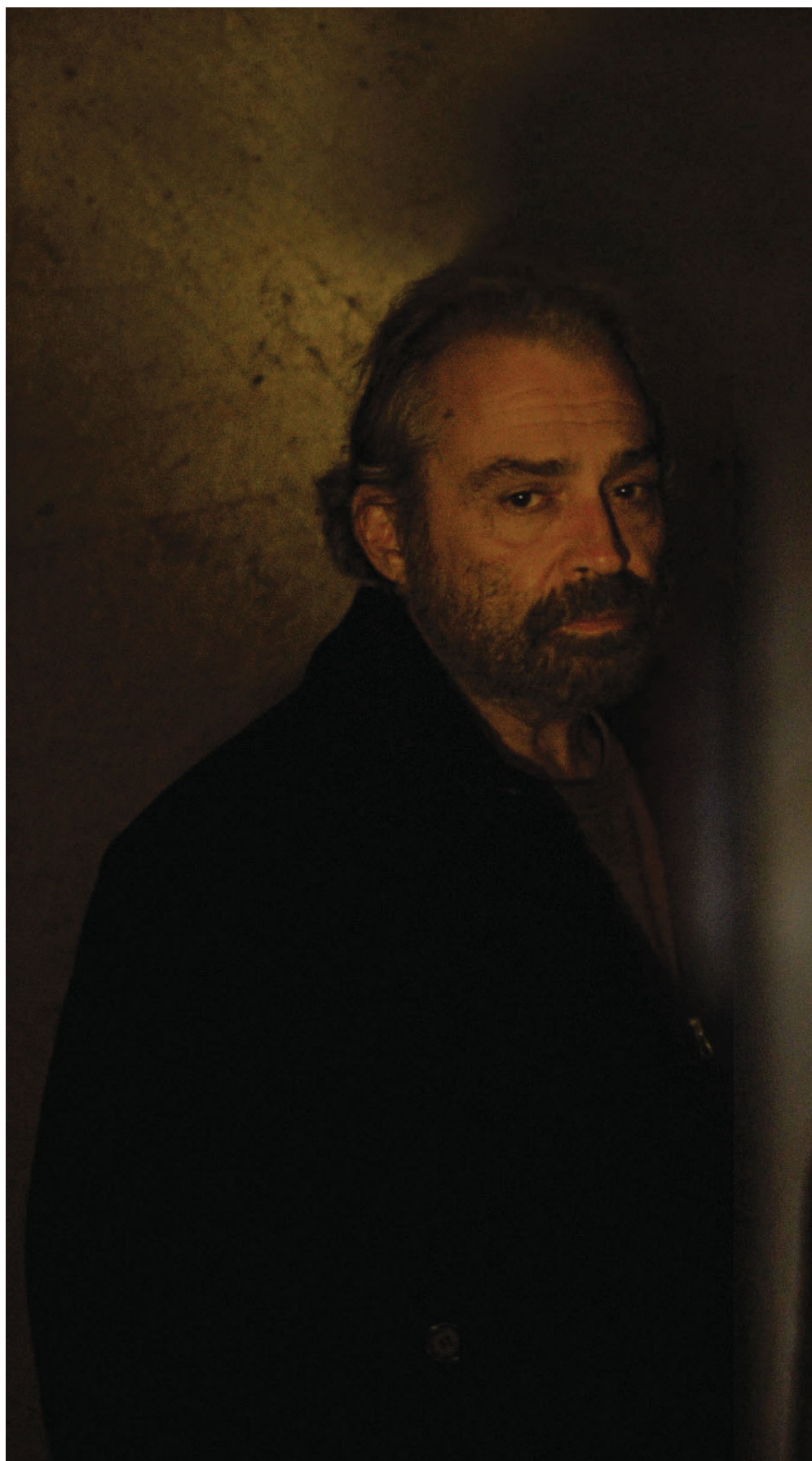
With echoes of Shakespeare, Chekhov and Bergman, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's 'Winter Sleep' is a claustrophobic, psychologically acute chamber drama exploring the self-delusions and failed relationships of a proud, vain hotelier in an isolated region of Turkey.

By Geoff Andrew

As widely noted at the time, it was no great surprise when Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Winter Sleep* won this year's Cannes Palme d'Or. After all, since first appearing in the main Competition with *Distant* (*Uzak*, 2002), which carried off both the Grand Prix and the Best Actor prizes, he'd won most of the festival's major awards. Besides, many felt *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* would have nabbed the big one in 2011, had Terrence Malick not made his long-awaited return to filmmaking with the emphatically ambitious *Tree of Life*. So hopes for *Winter Sleep* were high. Not for the first time, the predictions were right: the most prestigious of all festival prizes confirmed, if confirmation were still needed, that the remarkably consistent achievements of the Turkish writer-director had earned him a place among the most distinguished artists working in film today.

But what of the film itself? As ever with Ceylan, it shows him remaining absolutely true to his abiding concerns while at the same time challenging himself – and his audience. Centred on Aydin (Haluk Bilginer, familiar in the 80s to British television audiences as Mehmet in *EastEnders*), a retired middle-aged actor living with his younger wife Nihal (Melisa Sözen) and divorcee sister Necla (Demet Akbag) at his remote boutique hotel in Cappadocia, the film is another of Ceylan's piercingly astute, often affectionately witty studies in pride, vanity, insecurity and self-deception – especially (but not exclusively) of the masculine variety. The setting may seem a cosy haven from the hubbub of the modern world, but the warm, firelit interiors can have a suffocatingly claustrophobic effect, especially when tensions steadily mount, both within the household and in Aydin's dealings with some of his tenants, after a boy hurls a stone at his car windscreen. It's not only the glass that is damaged...

Ceylan's customary analytical (but never judgemental) interest in individual psychology and moral nuance, underpinned by his firm grasp of social delineation and interaction, ensures that the film's focus on Aydin and a few others resonates rather more widely; it's not only about very particular familial problems but a reflection on privilege and poverty, commitment and scepticism, success and failure, response and responsibility. In these regards, as in its open nod to Chekhov (whose name again appears in the closing credits), it's wholly in keeping with Ceylan's earlier work. Where it differs is in its more abundant talk and its (intentionally) oppressive interiority and audacious pacing; as in *Anatolia*, some scenes last long enough to begin to test our patience, just as the conversations they chronicle test that of the characters. When at one point we're suddenly out in the sunlight following a stallion speeding over a



PIECE



LOVE IN A COLD CLIMATE
Winter Sleep is a Chekhovian drama revolving around the relationship between Aydin (Haluk Bilginer), a retired actor now running a hotel in Cappadocia, and his wife Nihal (Melisa Sözen)

steppe, the sense of liberation is truly exhilarating.

Writing, as he has since *Climates* (2006), with his wife Ebru, Ceylan has again drawn on the kind of people, places and situations he knows from personal experience to fashion a film of far wider import: though marooned in deepest Cappadocia, his characters might be living more or less anywhere. Notwithstanding its rich echoes of Chekhov, Bergman, Shakespeare and others, it becomes clear from the first few scenes that nobody else could have made this particular chamberwork, such is the meticulous attention to every small but significant detail, to a visual beauty that's never merely picturesque, and to an account of human foibles that's at once painfully honest and admirably compassionate.

Our interview took place in Cannes several days before *Winter Sleep* won the Palme d'Or. Though Ceylan seemed relaxed and fairly pleased with the film, he evidently had no expectations regarding its potential as a prize-winner.

GA: How did the film come about?

NBC: It's inspired by several short stories by Chekhov. In fact, I'd been thinking about one of the stories for 15, maybe 16 years, but until now I felt it was very difficult to turn into a film. Nothing very much actually happens in the story, and while Chekhov is able to describe emotions in such a way that you understand them, when you're so dependent on dialogue it can be less clear. But finally, I felt sufficiently confident to make a film out of it; then, of course, I altered everything – changed characters, introduced new stories, things like that. First Ebru and I wrote the overall story, then for each scene we began to write the dialogue. She'd write her version, I'd write mine, then we'd compare them. And the battle begins!

Our morning discussions are to test out what we've written. It's by arguing about a scene that we make it deeper; also, we're able to see it from both the man's and the woman's point of view. So for each scene, we did this many times, rewriting the dialogue over and over, and in the end we had a script twice as long as the one for *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*. Then I shot around 200 hours of footage. So I'd no idea how long the film would turn out. My first cut was four and a half hours, then I got it down to three and a quarter hours.

GA: Was Aydin your starting point and main focus?

NBC: Yes. The Turkish word '*aydin*' means intellectual, so that's why we gave him that name. I know this character very well – from my own personality, and from my friends. I feel he's one of us. All human beings have very complex natures, and that's what I wanted to look at.

GA: Someone asked me if the film says anything about contemporary Turkey. How would you answer that?

NBC: Well, Aydin is a very typical modern Turkish intellectual, and there's a big gap between him and the poor people in the village. But this kind of gap between the educated well-off and the poor exists in most countries; it's not just Turkey. Then there's the fact that he's apparently not religious but writes about religious matters. In Turkey, if you're Muslim, you're not really free to write about religion. Sometimes people have an urge to speak out about religion – partly, perhaps, to show that they're not afraid to do so. Aydin is perhaps fairly typical in that he wants to be seen as a bit of a hero because he writes about religion, but at the same time there's a part of him that's quite cautious or timid. He wants to fight the fear he feels, but it still shows.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY FILIP VAN ROOYEVINE

GA: Haluk Bilginer, who plays Aydin, used to be in a British soap called *EastEnders*. Is that why you have Aydin say he never took roles in any soaps?

NBC: No, I didn't know he'd been in that series. I wrote that line because it implies he wasn't really successful as an actor. He says he doesn't like soaps; what he's not saying is that he hasn't been getting any offers of work – even for soaps. That's why he's at the hotel, and why he speaks so idealistically about theatre acting.

GA: You used to like casting your family and friends for your actors; here, as in your last film, you used seasoned professionals.

NBC: Well, we wanted the dialogue to be spoken exactly as written, with no changes. When such long conversations are involved, only professionals can do that. So we went for the best...

GA: Some scenes must have been very demanding in terms of getting the subtle mood shifts right. Did you rehearse much?

NBC: Not before the shoot, if that's what you mean. We just had the main actors read through the script two or three times. I don't like to do too much beforehand. At that point it feels artificial. Besides, I find myself beginning to hate the script. I just needed them to come prepared to memorise the dialogue for those long scenes.

GA: Did you always think the film would have rather more dialogue than your previous work?

NBC: Yes, I wanted to try that. But it's not just a question of the amount of dialogue; it's the kind of dialogue, which in this case is more literary, sometimes even quite philosophical. That was a big risk; most of the time such dialogue doesn't really work in cinema, where we're more used to hearing the language of the streets. But I wanted to do something different this time.

When I started making films, the dialogue in most Turkish movies was poor and not at all believable. For many of us it felt important to bring in more naturalistic dialogue – the language of the streets. So now there's generally no problem with the dialogue in Turkish films. That being the case, this time around I wanted to have the freedom to use another kind of language, such as you might find, for instance, in a novel. Now that may

not be the language of the streets, but you do find it in real life, especially when educated people who consider themselves intellectuals get together. I was always very concerned about whether I could make such language work. It's why Ebru and I discussed the dialogue so much. Sometimes she'd feel a scene needed more street language and I'd reject that argument; where I did, I take full responsibility for the results. Of course, I don't know if it works or not.

GA: I think it does; it shows how we modify the way we speak according to the situation we're in. But it's not only more literary. More than their predecessors, the characters in this film tend to say what they mean. Also, they use language for reasons of power: Aydin, for example, always likes to have the last word.

NBC: But as in the earlier films, they all still deceive each other, and themselves. Moreover, because they know each other well, they all understand that this is what's happening. For instance, the sister wants to go back to her husband, but knows the others will think she's weak if she does that, so she makes out it's her husband who wants her back – but obviously the others can see what she's doing. Meanwhile, Aydin tells his sister many things that aren't true – and she doesn't let him get away with that. This kind of thing happens all the time in life. Like everyone, I deceive myself a lot, because I try to protect myself; Of course, in real life we find that both necessary and useful. But in cinema it's important to face up to the truth and show what's really going on. That, for me, is one of the aims of art.

GA: Did you worry about the film being so long?

NBC: Of course. No one in the industry likes long films. The distributors, the cinema-owners, television – they all hate them. Most of the audience don't like long films. But I like the challenge. I like to have the freedom a novelist has. And here, the story insisted on being long, so what could I do? Besides, after the first few months of its theatrical release, a film has a different life on DVD or online, so you can watch it in fragments if you prefer. We rarely read novels in one sitting; why shouldn't we be able to watch films that way too? So in the longer term, the duration of a film is not so problematic. 

The distributors, the cinema-owners, television – they all hate long films. Most of the audience don't like them. But I like the challenge

IN A LONELY PLACE
Although the majority of *Winter Sleep* (below) takes place in the claustrophobic interiors of Aydin's hotel in Cappadocia, the film changes gear when Nuri Bilge Ceylan (left) takes the drama outside



GA: How important was it to shoot in that very striking location in Cappadocia?

NBC: Actually, I didn't want to shoot there; it felt too beautiful, too interesting. So I looked at many places for the hotel setting, but in the end I couldn't find another that was right. I not only needed a place that was very isolated; there also had to be a good reason for tourists to come to such a remote place. In the end this one was our best option; it was some way from town and had a landscape tourists would want to visit. The tourists were important because I wanted there to be people Aydin might bump into after a fight with his sister, people to whom he'd have to be polite at all times. To me that's almost a kind of alienation, part of life's dark side. I find it very hard to be social if I feel troubled or sad.

So that's why we went with this location. But in the end I liked it a lot; also, I don't show the landscape very much anyway.

GA: Much of it is a very interior film. The hotel seems cosy at first, but then you make it feel claustrophobic. When tensions arise, we want to get outside, and when we do we feel a kind of freedom...

NBC: Yes. And then there's the snow. That helped a lot. I wanted there to be snow, especially when Aydin leaves the house. When he decides he must change his life, it's important that the world feels a very different place. All that white. It makes him wonder whether he really wants to go back to Istanbul, what the appeal of that world is. At my age I know how he feels. I don't mean that with regard to Istanbul, but more generally: there comes a time when you feel you are being pushed away from life, by your age.

GA: Indeed! Let's change the subject. Your use of colour and lighting seems more naturalistic than in your last two films.

NBC: Well, I wanted it to be naturalistic in *Once Upon*

a *Time in Anatolia* too, but sometimes the technology wouldn't allow that; in some scenes the colour grading was quite strange. *Three Monkeys*, of course, wasn't naturalistic – but I don't like that look any more in terms of colour.

As for *Winter Sleep*, it's not just the colour but the style overall. I wanted it to be more neutral, less visible; not to draw attention to itself. So I tried to make it more typical. Shot-reverse shot for conversations. Some long takes, because I really wanted some of the conversations to feel long – though in life, obviously, they often last much longer, going round in circles until morning. That's the kind of mood I wanted to create.

GA: What's especially convincing is the way you build the discussions up, so that what begins as seemingly innocuous gradually can become very pointed and quite nasty.

NBC: If you know someone well, that means you also know their weaknesses, their vulnerable points. That's sometimes the tragedy of marriage. Normally you never use that knowledge, but sometimes, if you feel it's necessary, you'll use it.

GA: You've said before that you make a film partly for yourself, as a way of dealing with things you've been thinking about.

NBC: Well, I don't really make it for myself, but I do draw on myself, and in looking at myself, I also try to understand the nature of human relationships. I feel there's a darkness in life, and if I can face that realistically, then I feel better in myself, in that life becomes more understandable. More tolerable, perhaps. But you know me: I'm a pessimistic person... ☹

i *Winter Sleep* is released in UK cinemas on 21 November and is reviewed on page 93.

A Nuri Bilge Ceylan season runs at BFI Southbank, London, until the end of November

If you know someone well, that means you also know their vulnerable points. That's the tragedy of marriage. Sometimes you'll use that knowledge

TURKISH DELIGHTS
(Below, clockwise from top left) Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011), *Climates* (2006), *Three Monkeys* (2008) and *Distant* (2002)



BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (4)

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*THE THREEPENNY
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A FILM BY G.W.PABST

DIARY OF A LOST GIRL

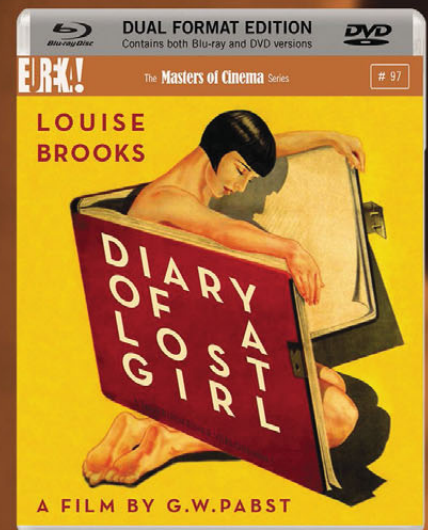
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TAKE 'EM TO MISSOURI
John Wayne as Thomas
Dunson and Montgomery
Clift as Matthew Garth – and
(right) Joanne Dru as Tess
Millay with Clift – in Howard
Hawks's *Red River*

WATCHING THE RIVER FLOW

It's impossible now to watch an old-fashioned western like Howard Hawks's 'Red River' or 'Rio Bravo' with the same eyes we did in, say, the 1970s or even the late 40s, but their influence on the cultural landscape still colours the way we receive modern counterparts like 'The Homesman'

By David Thomson

"I've taken the cattle to Abilene, time after time." "You saw nothing at Abilene."

Was it always just a foolish male fantasy dressed up to be smart? In which case where does that leave you when you're older than Groot was in *Red River* or Stumpy in *Rio Bravo*? Just to be clear, Walter Brennan was 54 when he did Groot and 65 for *Rio Bravo*. Neither of those men was retired, and neither am I. But I can't help looking back and wondering.

In 1976, I wrote a piece for this magazine, 'All Along the River', which explored my feelings for *Red River* over close to 30 years. As a child, I had loved the movie, its story, its shift from boyhood to manhood, its black-and-white West, and I had surely identified with Montgomery Clift's Matthew Garth. We are still shy talking about what that 'identification' means, yet most of us, I think, are drawn to movies because of it and are awkward spelling it out. We want to be *in* the movie. I don't mean we want to be actors, but we take the movie and try it on like a coat. By the late 70s, I was teaching *Red River* sometimes at Dartmouth, so I was identifying with Howard Hawks more than with Clift. But I had a son and named him Mathew. That son is 50 this year and doing better than Clift.

Well, the river keeps moving. In 2012, I was lucky enough to teach a class on Hawks at Stanford. I say 'lucky' because a lot of the students were good and because to coincide with that season the quite incredible David Packard mounted a complete season of Hawks films at the Stanford Theatre in Palo Alto, just down the road from the campus. When I say complete, I mean all the films, including *The Ransom of Red Chief* (part of the 1952 anthology film *Full House*) and *Corvette K-255* (aka *The Nelson Touch*). As I recall, only one of the movies was not projected in 35mm. It was a show such as can hardly come again. But how could I expect those students to see *Red River* or the other films through the eyes of 1976, or 1948? How does one admit that Matthew Garth might by now be older than Stumpy but far less sprightly and appealing? He could have such dementia that he no longer recalls those days going towards Abilene. Yet there must



have been a day when Stumpy was a spiffy kid, without a limp and with a knockout name ('The Lonesome kid?'), but with prairie women hanging on his tall stories.

A Stanford course is ten weeks, so we did not have enough time to examine all the films. Nor were many of the kids appreciative of what the Stanford Theatre was offering. They looked at a lot of the films on DVD or YouTube. Not that this is a depressing story – if professors feel gloomy, students don't take it too seriously. This group could not get enough of the comedies, and it is a grand feeling to sit young people down and show them things they have never seen before, or heard of – *Twentieth Century*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *His Girl Friday*, *To Have and Have Not*, *The Big Sleep*, *I Was a Male War Bride*, *Monkey Business*. We went back and forth with those films to let the students catch up on the jokes, the lines, the looks and the grace that were rushing by too fast for them. They adored the nerve, the insolence, the farce and the speed, and they were fascinated by the thought that in *His Girl Friday* Walter Burns and Hildy Johnson can't really be in love properly unless she's on the point of marrying another man. They laughed and then told themselves to hush in case they missed another wise-crack. They saw that Susan in *Baby* was enticing just because she was crazy and they rejoiced in a

blithe assumption that skeleton-gathering professors need to be educated.

Was that my deliberate mistake, listing the two Bogart-Bacall films among the comedies? I realise they are often put under the category of 'wartime drama' and 'hard-boiled detective mystery', and I have nothing but fond feelings for that Warner Brothers *noir* look, some time before it caught on at RKO. It's true, the one film has a resistance and ugly police, and the other is murder and bluff on those stunning Los Angeles sets. I'm not forgetting the death of Harry Jones or the thought that Steve and Slim are doing good by the Free French and the refugee La Chesnaye. But I must tell you that my students were in no doubt: those two films were comedies, begging for things like Bacall in the hotel doorway and the phone call to the police station. They wanted those scenes to go on forever, and of course they have. When Bacall died, they were her legend, and they still play. But can we drop any thought of realism and tough decent guys doing their job? These are movies about making a movie and just trying to be a little different. They are Howard Hawks keeping a straight face while bringing his fantasies to life, finding his own fraud and turning it into Matthew Garth's lean panache.

It was exactly that educated love of humour and masquerade that made for dismay with *Sergeant York*, *Air Force*, and even *Red River* and *Rio Bravo*. Now, they were on the edge with the latter: they could hear a version of the Bogart-Bacall back-talk whenever Angie Dickinson's Feathers started screwballing John Wayne's Chance in *Rio Bravo*. They knew that the use of Ricky Nelson and Dean Martin was droll inside show-business irony and Howard attempting to be cool. They were patient with the jailhouse sing-song. So why were they expected to take Chance's cockamamie besieged mentality so seriously? *Red River* was far tougher. Why the hell did Garth and Dunson have to talk like figures from Eugene O'Neill instead of Abbott and Costello? I did my best. I stood up for the steadfast father-son rivalry, the very story I had once applied to my own life. But I was lost when I had to admit that my Garth, our Clift, had nearly collapsed under the weight of that great hat and six-guns on his slim hips. When I added that a wrangler named Richard Farnsworth had taught Clift to stand up straight, chew grass and approach a horse from the right end, they knew what this movie should be: a *Twentieth Century*-like comedy of grown men and artful pretenders trying to act out an archaic dream. After all, they said, if this is serious father-son stuff, surely one of them had to die at the end. Or both? Leaving Tess Millay (Joanne Dru) to nurse Cherry Valance (John Ireland) back to health and robust performance?

I am writing this for *Sight & Sound* readers: so I'm taking it on trust that you know who Cherry Valance, Tess Millay and La Chesnaye were, and are. But maybe I'm a chump to be sure of that. The river moves on, and knowing a lot of obscure facts about old movies may be an early sign of onset dementia, or having Stumpyness in your head. Only the other day I read a piece in the *New Yorker*, by Adam Gopnik, on the current attitudes to Scott Fitzgerald. He took Fitzgerald's line about there being no second acts in America and he applied it to several people, including Orson Welles, who went downhill after two films. Well, maybe Adam Gopnik is

a dope – though I thought his essay was rather good – or is he closer to being right than I care to hear? In other words, after more than 50 years of Welles recovery, a lot of books (none of them dull) and every chance to survey the whole of Welles's work (including many old holes in the filmography), maybe that old theory of a burned-out case has slunk back into orthodoxy.

HOW THE WEST WAS SPUN

One of the problems the Stanford kids had with *Red River* and *Rio Bravo* was simply that they were not just westerns, but old-fashioned westerns – with Stetsons, horses, .45s, whisky, generally meek women waiting to be noticed and a thoroughly conservative attitude to 'progress'. They agreed that neither Tess Millay nor Feathers quite fit that bill, but that only sharpened their need for a more modern approach. After all, they said, here we are in the west of the United States where Stanford may be the best school in the most intellectually active, devious and formative part of the nation. The action is here! And we're as sharp and fast as Walter Burns, or we try to be.

Of course, the western genre has not gone away, but it needs to benefit from a new historical awareness in which the streets are filthy, the clothes are more varied and where honour and a free market are under the pressures we know today. Think of Steve Jobs as Wyatt Earp. So *Open Range* was a lovely piece of nostalgia. *Unforgiven* is a classic western now, and until Clint presses the old angel of death switch at the very end it adheres to the refreshing idea that courage is a myth for fools, while killing is very nasty. *Deadwood* was a fair portrait of a real shithole city in the West (at 4,500 feet, the muds are fit to drown in). And we have had films, in modern dress, that are natural developments of western themes. Think of *Badlands*, *The Right Stuff*, *The Parallax View*, *Chinatown* (where Noah Cross even wears a cowboy hat and has water in his veins) – those are films about the way the western states have altered the notion of what America is and wants to be. *The Social Network* is a new western in which Harvard goes to Palo Alto, and where legal depositions have taken the place of battles (lawyers are our gunslingers). *Melvin and Howard* is the sweet romance of a no-hoper meeting up with a lost god. Isn't *Casino* gamblers trying to be businesslike in a desert where you can bury your opponents? *There Will Be Blood*, harsh and surreal

The problem with 'The Homesman' is that it shuts its female characters up in a box on wheels and effectively omits them from the film



KOBAL COLLECTION (6)

as it may be, speaks to the narrow-minded pioneer spirit that made and broke the West. *Breaking Bad* was a series that kept returning to another bitter desert and lone operators desperate to survive. And what is *No Country for Old Men* but the latest version of *The Wild Bunch*, in which outlawry has become regular business and a sheriff is left not just to turn in his badge (the old gesture from *High Noon* and *Dirty Harry*), but deliver the saddest elegy to what has gone missing in the civilisation of exploitation?

Tommy Lee Jones delivers that speech and he is a landmark now in western eloquence and iconography. He is himself from Texas, still lives there by choice, and is one of the authentic hard faces in modern movies. His *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* was a beautiful amalgam of a Peckinpah mission with irony worthy of Mark Twain, and it was a measured account of wretched attitudes to Hispanics (*Rio Bravo* is failing that test now – remember Carlos?). So I was more than ready for *The Homesman*, his new film, adapted from a novel by Glendon Swarthout (who also wrote the original for *The Shootist*, that fond swansong for John Wayne).

I like *The Homesman* (I should admit that I am friendly with its producer, Michael Fitzgerald), for its main story, its respect for landscape, Jones's unsentimental rascal character, for the superb hotel passage and the wry ending. But I have a problem with it, and I think it's at the heart of my quandary with Howard Hawks.

The job the homesman has to do is conduct three young women who have gone mad back east to Iowa for some sort of security and ease. The premise is that the terrible hardships of life on the prairie (it's Nebraska) have made these women insane. They have had a hard time: they've lost husbands and children, home and peace of mind. But as people in the old West knew, you can't have everything. I'm sure some people lost their mind from loneliness, untreated pain and the several kinds of savagery that were on hand – much of it delivered by their fellows and families. In fact, the history of the West shows that women coped pretty well. They pulled the wagons over mountains, they told bears to go shoo; they had the children and cooked the meals and tried to sweep the dust out of the houses; they agreed to be whores for a while; some of them were kidnapped by Indians and some of those found the Indians might be better companions than their husbands. I'm sure some women lost their



INTO THE WEST
Hilary Swank and Tommy Lee Jones in *The Homesman* (above); *Deadwood*, 'a fair portrait of a real shithole city in the West' (below); and John Wayne as Sheriff John T. Chance and Angie Dickinson as Feathers in *Rio Bravo* (below, left)

minds, but so did some men, and some of those wayward geniuses got elected and became power-brokers.

What does 'lost their minds' mean? The disappointment in *The Homesman* is that it never examines the women's minds or wonders if talking to them might help. Indeed, it shuts them up in a box on wheels and effectively omits them from the film. If it had been Hawks in charge, then at least one of those women – it might have been Grace Gummer – could have talked up a storm and driven Jones's character George Briggs to distraction the way Feathers gets under John T. Chance's skin.

But at the end of *Rio Bravo*, the feisty Feathers does then fold her wings and give every hint of being ready to curl up and do what Chance tells her, even if he's her senior by 24 years. That's the complacent fantasist in Hawks, the man who liked to cultivate independence in a woman so long as she went quietly and obediently at the end of the film. That's part of what was always wrong, or worse, in the western. That's why Marge in *Fargo* and Mrs Miller (with McCabe) are bold surprises who have lived long enough to dispense with the risks in dreamy men. You see, I wouldn't mind a version of John Ford's *The Searchers* in which Debbie, the Natalie Wood character, says thanks but no thanks to her self-satisfied Uncle Ethan. Perhaps she rather likes her Comanche guy, Scar. Perhaps she has children already, and maybe she is trying to erase the memory of life in that cabin in the middle of the desert. Truly, it's no place to live. As it is, somehow Scar has got her that pretty rose-coloured dress and found a beauty parlour for her. Nobody can say Debbie has lost her mind.

I'm not blaming Hawks, or us, for liking him. He was an expert filmmaker, and he did great comedies – *The Big Sleep* is still one of the astonishing and indefinable films to come out of Hollywood. But he was not at his best whenever he turned solemn. He should have known that, if he's so funny and gentle with the stupid gravity of Bruce in *His Girl Friday*. But the river moves on, as Renoir found in *India*. Every day it looks fresh and beautiful. But in 50 or 60 years it can change direction and wash over the graves of all those who gazed at it. Old men recollect (just about) but the river has no memory. ☹



The Homesman is released in UK cinemas on 21 November and is reviewed on page 60. Red River is available on Blu-ray from Eureka/Masters of Cinema



DREAMS OF A LIFE

Steve James's *'Life Itself'* is an infectiously warm account of the career of the late Pulitzer prize-winning US film critic Roger Ebert, charting his near 50-year relationship with the *'Chicago Sun-Times'*, his pioneering work on television and his enthusiastic late-life conversion to blogging

By Nick Bradshaw

I was not entirely surprised when Steve James failed to pull out his camera and start filming me when we met at this year's Sheffield Doc/Fest. Making two consecutive films about movie hacks might be a little heavy, and it would be hard to improve on the current one, a testament to the life of America's late popular heavyweight Roger Ebert. Taking its cue (and title) from his memoirs, *Life Itself* is a supremely elegant and infectiously warm account of a man who both shaped and transcended the movies, and a life that – *pace* what Ebert's beloved *The Great Gatsby* tells us about American lives – formed three neat acts, professionally and personally. One: the swiftly naturalised Chicagoan, seemingly born to print, who had an ease with both the word and the bottle, as a number of lifelong muckers recount. Two, the popularising TV pundit alongside fellow Chicagoan Gene Siskel on a series of shows best remembered under the moniker *Siskel & Ebert*, which splashed the pair's thumbs up/thumbs down verdicts across the TVs and billboards of America; James has the outtakes, and the producers' testimonies, to show that these two "radioactive" egos' behind-the-scenes show was just as much of a ride. Three constitutes Ebert's latter-life uplift, even as cancer took away his jaw and his voice, with his 1992 marriage to trial attorney Chaz Hammelsmith and his turn to self-publishing on the internet, where he found communion with a global audience numbering in the high hundreds of thousands.

Also in the mix are tributes from some of the filmmakers

Ebert supported and befriended, beyond James himself, for whose *Hoop Dreams* (1994). Ebert banged the drum hard. Werner Herzog hails this "soldier of cinema" and "wounded comrade". Martin Scorsese is very funny on the pleasures and bewilderments of Russ Meyer's Ebert-scripted *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970). And there's Ebert himself, on camera, engaging with James and the audience and laying down his last submissions to the cinema; he finally succumbed to cancer in April 2013, five months after James had begun working with him, so the film's interviewees waver between referring to him in the present and the past. His words are beautifully read in the movie by voice actor Stephen Stanton.

NB: It's probably fair to say that Ebert meant more to Americans than to the rest of us, at least before that third act brought him into direct orbit over the internet. We might know him as the 'two thumbs up' guy, but can you tell us what else he represented?

SJ: That's where his international audience came from, his third act. Something like half the people who followed him on his website were international. Which is pretty remarkable for someone who really was an American phenomenon and icon.

Being the first film critic to win the Pulitzer [in 1975] was a feather in his cap, to be sure. He built his reputation in the world of [written] film criticism, but in terms of the broader reach, because he was in Chicago, I don't think he had it. The show really did it – that's how I first heard about him, how most people did. I remember my reaction when I first tripped across it: first, "This is kind of curious" and then, "Why Chicago critics?" I was studying film at that point, and you never thought of Chicago as any kind of place where film criticism of any great value would emanate from. But when you go back and look at the show, you realise what terrific television it was. They managed to do something that is really hard, which is talk about a film incisively in a short period of time and create a real dialogue and debate. They were smart shows – unless we're all dumbed down, which is what [*Time* magazine critic] Richard Corliss said it would do. Which I don't agree with, but had to be in my film because it's a criticism that has been made.

JOLLY ROGER

Roger Ebert (right) showed remarkable resilience after being diagnosed with cancer in 2002, never losing his sense of humour and continuing to attend screenings even though he found travelling to festivals more difficult towards the end of his life; Ebert's press card from the 1980 Cannes Film Festival (below left)





NB: Presumably in the shows' dialogue there are nuances that you don't get in the thumbs system?

SJ: Absolutely. They came up with the thumbs up/thumbs down as a final decision about whether to go see a film or not, but yes, within the dialogue there were far more nuances about what the film's values were or where it fell short. I talked to A.O. Scott about this, and he said there's a part of him that thinks to render a final judgement is sort of an expectation of film criticism at the level of a daily newspaper critic. Certainly not in terms of the kind of ruminative criticism that would go on in a journal like *Sight & Sound*, and maybe not as definitive as thumbs up/thumbs down, which was a gimmick of sorts, but it was also like, "Okay, time to say." Just like if someone came up to you here at the film festival and said, "Should I see it or not?" You could say, "Well, you might want to and da da da..." "But yeah, should I see it or not?" "Er, no, I don't think you should."

Anyway, the show raised the level of debate among more common, everyday moviegoers. In the film they talk about people coming in to the [Chicago] *Sun-Times*,

going over the music desk and being worshipful, [asking] "What did you think?" And then they come over to Ebert and go, "I totally disagree with your review." That's the thing about movies being the most democratic of art-forms: everyone, no matter their level of understanding and experience in watching films, thinks they know what a good film and a bad film is. And that show encouraged people to say more than just "I liked it" or "I didn't like it." It encouraged them to explain why, and debate it.

NB: And it's not like there's an established tradition of quality film criticism on TV to follow.

SJ: No, they created the whole phenomenon, and did it better than anybody else I've seen. And the thing that's amazing about Roger is that after they reinvented the idea of film criticism for television, after he lost his voice, he reinvented himself on the internet, and I believe he did for internet criticism what he did for television criticism. He wasn't the first, but he was the most prominent who embraced it early, and made it more legit. Up until Roger really got serious about criticism and blogging on the net – and before paid journalists were

The thing that's amazing about Roger is that after he reinvented the idea of film criticism for television, after he lost his voice, he reinvented himself on the internet

losing all their jobs in the States – that was where you'd go to write if you didn't have a job: no one will pay you, so put your opinion on the internet.

NB: Which ironically was a space also embraced by his sometime Chicago adversary Jonathan Rosenbaum, who has clearly been delighted by its possibilities.

SJ: Yeah! Rosenbaum said for himself, the internet is where it happens for him; it's his livelihood and reach.

NB: I felt the way you sequenced Rosenbaum's arguments about the TV show shutting out smaller movies suggested you don't really buy his claim.

SJ: His point is both true and not entirely true. I wasn't just putting him in there to be refuted; he's right that the show reviewed a lot of Hollywood movies, and Roger did Oscar broadcasts from the red carpet. They were part of that industry, without question.

But you don't have to look too far to find dozens of filmmakers who say, "Without that show embracing my film, it would have disappeared without a trace." I could have interviewed many more... And when you go back and look at what was being reviewed: it's amazing, actually. In any given week there might have been three, five Hollywood movies, but there were a lot of weeks where there are two Hollywood movies and a Fassbinder, a Schlöndorff, an indie American film or a documentary. Hollywood absolutely used them, 'two thumbs up' became a huge deal, but they didn't allow themselves to be fully co-opted. But Rosenbaum's a brilliant guy and I was so glad he was candid in the film, because he does represent a point of view about what Siskel and Ebert were doing to film criticism.

NB: It encapsulates an ongoing debate concerning which movies should be talked about that's partly a legitimate question of principle and partly pure catty ideology.

SJ: Yes, there was an element of jealousy of their power among some of the critics who felt more knowledgeable or scholarly or, "Why not me?"

NB: It's an amazing point to be making a film, on that cusp of present and past tense. You've got the present-tense documentary of Ebert as well as a history piece.

SJ: Creatively it was an exciting, fun film to put together. Going back and forth between the present and past: I very much enjoyed that part of the process.

But I didn't, when we started, expect that he was going to be gone. And the stuff in the present was going to be about how resilient he has been and continues to be; how he carries on despite all he's been through, and goes to screenings, has parties... He wasn't travelling as much to festivals those last couple of years, but I was determined to show he's trying not to miss a step if he can, despite all this. We weren't able to show that, but I think the deeper thing was there, which is he's still Roger, he's still got the sense of humour, he's still working, doing what he does, despite even more adversity. Which in a way just made it more poignant.

NB: His eyes, in the hospital scenes, are so expressive and vivacious.

SJ: There's that quote I put at the beginning about how he sees his life as a movie: he doesn't know how he got in it, but he's trying to enjoy it. Not in a facile way, but I think he enjoyed the ride, just like in a good movie. He had his dark moments and tough times, but always seemed to embrace whatever it was, on some level. Including the end. He says to Chaz, "I've had a great life, and



PHOTOGRAPH BY NVC

death is a part of life." It's a pretty remarkable thing to say when facing it right there: we should all be so happy with our lives, and brave to face [our end].

NB: Also very moving is his note about it being his film as well as yours – and he gets you to show yourself in the mirror, like the Maysles in *Grey Gardens*. Was he a big aficionado of documentaries too? He supported *Hoop Dreams*, of course...

SJ: He supported many docs; he loved documentary. They did a lot of docs on the show – starting with Errol Morris. *Gates of Heaven* [1978] was the first documentary they reviewed, but from then they did them consistently. Famously, they saved [Louis Malle's doc-ish 1981 film] *My Dinner with André* from obscurity: they just pounded the drum for that film. Other critics played a role, but reviewing it on their show got it out there – in the pre-internet age, nobody's reading the *New York Times* online.

Even my work: when *The Interrupters* premiered at Sundance [in 2011], we'd sent him a screener, but I didn't hear anything from him until he tweeted on the opening night: "Oscar-worthy"... He knew exactly what he was doing, and the right time to do it. And he was outraged when we didn't get shortlisted, and wrote about it, like he had done with *Hoop Dreams*, if not on the same scale, because then there'd been more... outrage. But he continued to be very supportive of my work over the years.

I wouldn't have done the film just for that, though, nor just because he was an important critic I admired. I don't know that that would have been appealing enough to me. It wasn't until I read the memoir and saw what an incredible life journey he'd had that I really wanted to do the film. It's the most poetic and thoughtful prose that he's written. He really did just start to take account of his life in those last few years, and with the memoir really did it. As soon as he gets to Chicago, at any rate, it just takes off. It's a great read. ☺

i *Life Itself* is released on 14 November and is reviewed on page 78

In the film Roger says to his wife, 'I've had a great life, and death is a part of life.' It's a pretty remarkable thing to say when facing it right there

CRITICAL MASS

Roger Ebert helped pioneer film criticism on television with Gene Siskel in *Sneak Previews* (above) and later in *Siskel & Ebert* and other early incarnations of *At the Movies*. Ebert continued as a host on the show after Siskel's death in 1999, initially with a series of guest critics and later with Richard Roeper



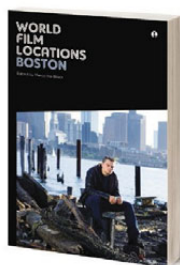
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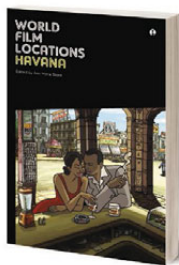
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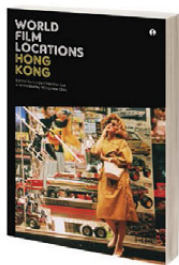
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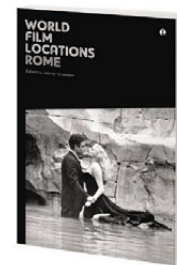
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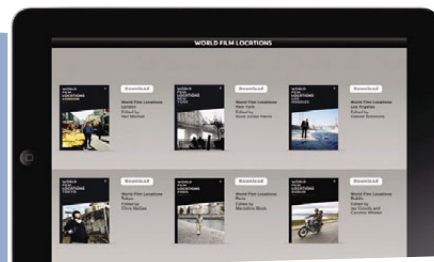


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'Stations of the Cross', Dietrich Brüggemann's exploration of a teenage girl's growing religious fanaticism, is the latest in a string of films exploring Christianity and its adherents – a trend that hints at a wider cultural and spiritual disquiet at the heart of the contemporary world

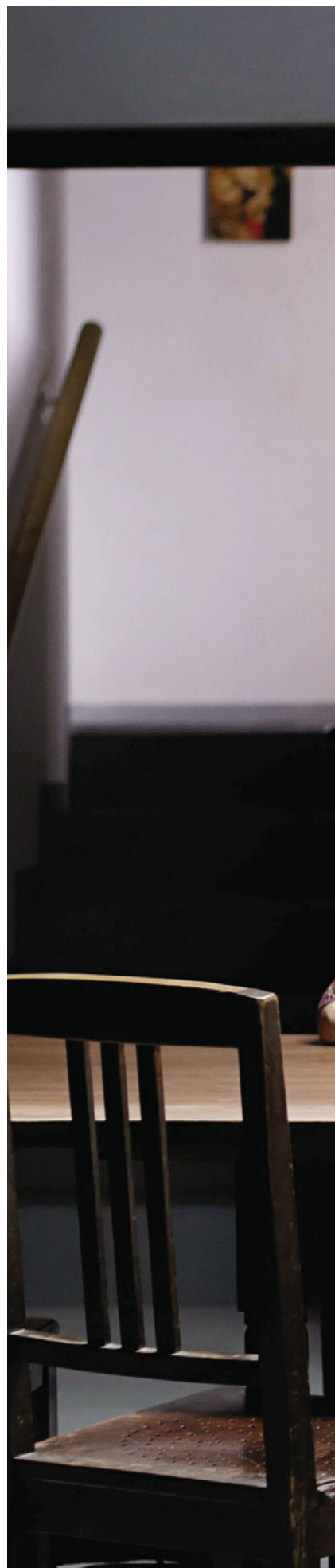
By Catherine Wheatley

HOLY MOTORS

In Christian art, the Stations of the Cross are a series of images depicting Jesus's journey to his crucifixion at Calvary. Starting with Christ's sentencing and ending with his burial, there are usually 14 stations, of which anywhere between seven and 14 might be rendered as paintings or sculptures. They hang in churches and cathedrals, serving as a reminder of the sacrifice that Christ made for the sake of man, intended to inspire contemplation, gratitude and remorse. An early form of serialisation, they are in a sense proto-cinematic.

Screenwriter Anna Brüggemann and her director brother Dietrich, who also had a hand in the script, hew closely to both the spirit and style of these artworks for their *Stations of the Cross*, which follows teenage protagonist Maria (Lea van Acken), a member of the fictional Society of St. Paul, as she becomes increasingly extreme in her devotion to Jesus. The film is divided into 14 self-contained chapters, each representing a different station and filmed in a continuous deep-focus long take. With three key exceptions, the camera never moves. The direction is sparse to the point of austerity, the performances pared back. Opening with a 15-minute theological discussion between a priest and the younger members of his congregation, this is a film that takes Christianity seriously and asks its audience to do likewise.

In present-day Europe, that's something of a bold move. The developed West more or less did away with God some time ago, and the Church is no longer something we particularly concern ourselves with. As Terry Eagleton points out in *Culture and the Death of God*, traditional churchgoing is in





RESTLESS SPIRITS
Father Weber (Florian Stetter) in discussion with Maria (Lea van Acken), a young woman who becomes increasingly obsessive in her devotion to Jesus in Dietrich Brüggemann's *The Stations of the Cross*

perpetual decline, while the strident scepticism of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens has struck a chord with the book-buying classes. At worst Christianity is seen as reactionary, at best softheaded and out of date. For most of us, it's an eccentricity or a bad habit, something that politicians and the royal family pay lip service to at Christmas. As an impassioned Father Weber (Florian Stetter) explains to his army of child soldiers in the opening scene of *Stations of the Cross*, their church needs warriors right now precisely because there are so few left.

And yet *Stations* isn't quite the curiosity piece that it might first appear. Over the last decade a slow but regular supply of European films have cast a cool gaze upon Christianity and its adherents. The starting point was arguably Philip Gröning's *Into Great Silence* (2005), a 169-minute meditation on the sequestered inhabitants of a Carthusian monastery. The following year Saverio Costanzo's study of a handsome young postulant set almost entirely in a Venetian seminary, *In Memory of Me* (2006), saw some festival success. A pause, and then in 2009 a boon year, with Jessica Hausner's *Lourdes*, Bruno Dumont's *Hadewijch*, and Eugène Green's *The Portuguese Nun* all examining a particularly female experience of faith. Soon afterwards came Xavier Beauvois's *Of Gods and Men* (2010), Nanni Moretti's *We Have a Pope* (*Habemus Papam*, 2011) and Alice Rohrwacher's *Corpo Celeste* (2011). The list continues. This year *Stations of the Cross* joins John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary* and Pawel Pawlikowski's *Ida* among the films explicitly concerned with the trials and tribulations of the latter-day Church.

IN GOD WE TRUST

To a certain extent, these works are continuations of a longstanding tradition in European Cinema; after all, as André Bazin had it, "The cinema has always been interested in God." But despite McDonagh's claims that his film is inspired by the transcendental phenomenology and the spiritual style of Robert Bresson, these are not, on the whole, works that strive for the sublime. Instead, this is a cinema concerned with the dirty, dusty form of Christianity as it is practised by men and women: its observances and rituals, its ornaments and doctrines. It is a cinema inhabited by priests, monks and even the Pope himself, littered with Annas, Marias, Anna-Marias, Marthas, Christines and Bernadettes. Its action turns around convents and cloisters, local churches and Lourdes. Its soundtrack is the hushed rumble of whispered vespers. There are miracles to be found too within these strange, often severe films. In *Stations of the Cross*, a mute child speaks; in *Lourdes*, a paraplegic walks. Dumont's *Hors Satan* (2011) sees the dead raised.

The directors of these films cleave to the great works of Christian art. The first, impressive scene of *Stations of the Cross* bears a striking resemblance to da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (1494–98); the second to Raphael's *Madonna of the Meadow* (1505). Maria on her deathbed is Bellini's *Imago pietatis* (c1457): eyes downcast, wrists crossed. Many critics noted the influence of Vermeer on *Ida*, but a perceptive few spotted the similarities of certain shots to Renaissance Madonnas. Pawlikowski draws visual parallels too, between his young heroine and the smooth, cold marble statues of Christ that fill the convent where she grew up. Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) –



which offers an allegory of religious divisions in 16th-century England – has a significant place in *Calvary*.

Foregrounding the art-historical traditions in which they stand, these works make explicit the twin legacies of protestant asceticism and Catholic adornment that wind their way through whole swathes of European cinema. The austere style of Michael Haneke, meanwhile, has much in common with the puritanical Protestantism that he so rigorously critiqued in *The White Ribbon* (2009). In films more and less concerned with Christianity, Ulrich Seidl (who had ambitions to join the priesthood before becoming a filmmaker) captures his subjects in front-on, symmetrical tableaux that recall Catholic altarpieces. His subject matter comes straight from Hieronymus Bosch. Catherine Breillat's cinematic universe is heavy with Catholic symbolism, nowhere more so than in *Bluebeard* (2009), whose narrative is described by the director as "a version of the Fall", and which departs startlingly from all the source material with a convent-set prologue.

BRIDES OF CHRIST

Catholic imagery is rife too in the films of Bruno Dumont, as are recurring Christ figures, from the epileptic anti-hero of *La Vie de Jésus* (1997) through the inscrutable detective of *L'Humanité* (1999) to the impassive soldier of *Flanders* (2006). Céline, the overzealous novitiate of *Hadewijch* – in which Catholicism takes centre stage – is a variant on the theme, but she also sits alongside *Ida*'s Anna and *Stations of the Cross*'s Maria as a particular type common to these films. Inhabiting a liminal space between girlhood and adulthood, these young women – whey-faced, woeful, almost androgynous – channel their burgeoning sexuality into becoming 'brides of Christ'. Their piety is thus imbued with a subliminal eroticism, a notion taken to an extreme by Seidl in *Paradise: Faith*, in which a woman masturbates with a crucifix, and by Jean-Claude Brisseau's series of soft-porn quasi-religious odysseys. A genre unto themselves, Brisseau's films are full of nubile young nuns who take the notion of spiritual ecstasy that step too far.

Like Anna, Céline is cast out of the safe confines of her convent into secular society in order to better learn what is at stake in becoming a bride of Jesus. Like Maria, her devotion takes her to the limits of the endurable. For all three young women, Christianity is bound up with violence, as it also is for Marta, the younger heroine of *Corpo Celeste*, a child who, for the film's final third, must literally shoulder her cross. These desperate girls find their mirror images in the ageing clergymen suffering

In the aftermath of political disappointment, when democracy and capitalism, the Gods of civil religion, have deserted us, there is potential solace in a return to their predecessors

crises of faith who similarly proliferate throughout these films. The sorrows of Brendan Gleeson's 'good priest' in *Calvary* and Michel Piccoli's Supreme Pontiff in *We Have a Pope* alike resound in the plaintive cry of Olivier Rabourdin's besieged brother Christophe in *Of Gods and Men*: "O Lord, please do not forsake me." Staggering beneath the burdens that their callings have placed upon them, shell-shocked by the confrontation with secularism, these men duck and reel like ageing fighters, the cares of the world carved upon their craggy faces. As the old patriarchal, paternalistic church crumbles, its girl children are left insecure and disorientated, clinging to a creed out of fear rather than faith.

NOSTALGIA FOR THE SACRED

Grown men undergoing crises of identity; adolescent girls casting desperately about for some way to channel their turbulent emotions: these are archetypes as old as cinema itself. And there is, of course, nothing specifically religious about them. We might just as well be describing *Gone Girl*'s newly redundant Nick Dunne, or the winsome teens of *The Bling Ring*. Indeed the anxieties those films speak to – about big business, consumer culture and economic collapse – might be more pertinent to modern audiences. Who worries now that our children will become fundamentalist Catholics? We are rather more concerned, aren't we, about the dangers of the internet, the unbalanced influence of the one per cent?

Perhaps though it is precisely the fear of, as Maria puts it in *Stations*, "a world of TV and Facebook and people who've sold their souls to be dead in the middle of life" that underpin this filmic return to older forms of religion. In the aftermath of political disappointment, when democracy and capitalism, the Gods of civil religion, have deserted us, there is potential solace in a return to their predecessors. In the press notes for *Stations of the Cross*, Anna Brüggemann describes "a very strong yearning for unshakable values and simple truths" among her peers. Her brother Dietrich agrees: "Our own lives are so splintered, we're swimming in a sea of meaningless actionism – it is only one little step before we start dreaming ourselves away to a monastery, watching films in which the silent practice of one's faith is interpreted favourably."

Viewed in this light, slow cinema itself seems to stand for a spiritual retreat of sorts. We are nostalgic for the sacred so we collect examples of cinematic seriousness and call it spirituality. It's telling in this regard that *Hadewijch*'s Céline hails from an affluent family; that *Calvary*'s Father James has swapped a life of grief and alcoholism in London for one of sobriety and sequestration in Sligo; that *Ida*'s Anna turns her back on an inherited apartment full of chic dresses and whisky bottles and on a handsome jazz-musician suitor, the polo-necked epitome of modernisation. These beleaguered souls hark back to a romantic sensibility that equates the meaningful with suffering, turbulence, passion – the very paradigm of the Cross.

It should be said, though, that these films are not for Christianity; they have little relation to the recent slew of faith-based movies snaking through America's heartland, or the big-budget biblical epics – the likes of Darren Aronofsky's *Noah* and Ridley Scott's *Exodus: Gods and Kings* – that followed Mel



THE NEW SEEKERS
Maria demands that the music in her gym class is switched off on the grounds that it is the work of the devil, in *Stations of the Cross* (above opposite); and (from top) Alice Rohrwacher's *Corpo Celeste*, Bruno Dumont's *Hadewijch* and Pawel Pawlikowski's *Ida*

➡ Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). They certainly aren't theological treatises. Nor are they against Christianity. Arguably, they don't need to be. The previous generation of provocateurs – Buñuel, Pasolini, Rivette – took blasphemy and anticlericalism as far as it needed to go, and modern audiences hardly bat an eyelid at Seidl's debauched iconoclasm. Instead, works such as *Stations of the Cross* and *Ida* are characterised by ambivalence and ambiguity, poised precariously between credence and scepticism. They speak to a yearning for belief, rather than belief itself. God himself is absent. Time and again these characters call out to him, but they receive little by way of reply.

EXOTIC FUNDAMENTALISM

What did we lose when we committed deicide? Did we even do the deed? Terry Eagleton wryly concludes that “the Almighty has proved remarkably difficult to dispose of”, while Dietrich Brüggemann cites the global resurgence of radical practitioners of faith as inspiration for *Stations of the Cross*. “While in the late 20th century we were still able to believe that religion had more or less become irrelevant,” he states, “today we see the opposite everywhere: the spread of evangelical Christians in America, the permanent media presence of militant Islam.” Perhaps because, as the dictum has it, it's easier to write about what you know, *Stations of the Cross* imagines a local manifestation of this phenomenon (and it's worth noting in this respect that the Society of St. Paul was inspired by the real-life Society of St. Pius X, notorious for its rejection of all the semi-liberal reforms adopted by the Vatican since the late 60s). In this regard, the film's success is debatable. While *Stations of the Cross* offers a compelling portrait of fundamentalism and the damage it can wreak on impressionable young minds, in the European context it smacks of anachronism, if not absurdity. The catalogue of sins, temptations and traps that Maria might fall into is faintly risible (“Soul and gospel music!” Maria's mother wails, aghast).

There is certainly an exotic fascination, though, to seeing a European Christian equivalent to the fundamentalism that we associate today with other places, other religions. The film itself reflects cleverly on our coyness about home-grown fanaticism in a gym-class argument between Maria, her classmates and her teacher: while her Islamic peers are allowed to miss the class on the grounds of ‘tolerance’, Maria's insistence that the Roxette track they're skipping to be switched off on the grounds that it's “the devil's music” is met with jeers and insults.

Other filmmakers have drawn more direct comparisons, pairing up their Christian protagonists with Islamic counterparts. *Hadewijch's* Céline enters a friendship with extremist Nassir that takes her to Palestine; while the marriage of evangelist Anna Maria to Nabil in *Paradise: Faith* ends in brutal confrontation, and the mutual respect between the monks and mujahidin insurgents in *Of Gods and Men* leads to death. Implicit in these narratives of mutual destruction is both a confrontation and conflation of two different forms of fundamentalism. It is surely no coincidence that these studies of Christian zeal arose in the years following 9/11. We are not so different, these films tell us, and at the same time they ask us, “What would we be willing to die for?”



Works such as 'Stations of the Cross' and 'Ida' are characterised by ambiguity. They speak to a yearning for belief, rather than belief itself. God himself is absent

KEEPING THE FAITH

Critics have worked hard to downplay the Christian elements of these films. They tease the political aspects out of *Of Gods and Men*, read it in the context of post-colonialism and military imperialism. They argue that *We Have a Pope* is a social satire, *Ida* is a meditation on Polish history, *Calvary* a reflection on Ireland's economic collapse.

They are these things, undoubtedly. But they are also, crucially, reflections of Christianity's place as part of our cultural and historical heritage. In conversation with Livia Bloom for *Filmmaker* magazine Pawlikowski describes the central questions that motivate *Ida* as having to do with how we understand the contemporary place of religion. “What does it mean to be Christian?” he asks. “Can you be a good Christian without being Polish Catholic? Is religion a tribal demarcation or is it something spiritual within you? What defines identity? The blood that you have? The faith you grew up with or your self-understanding?”

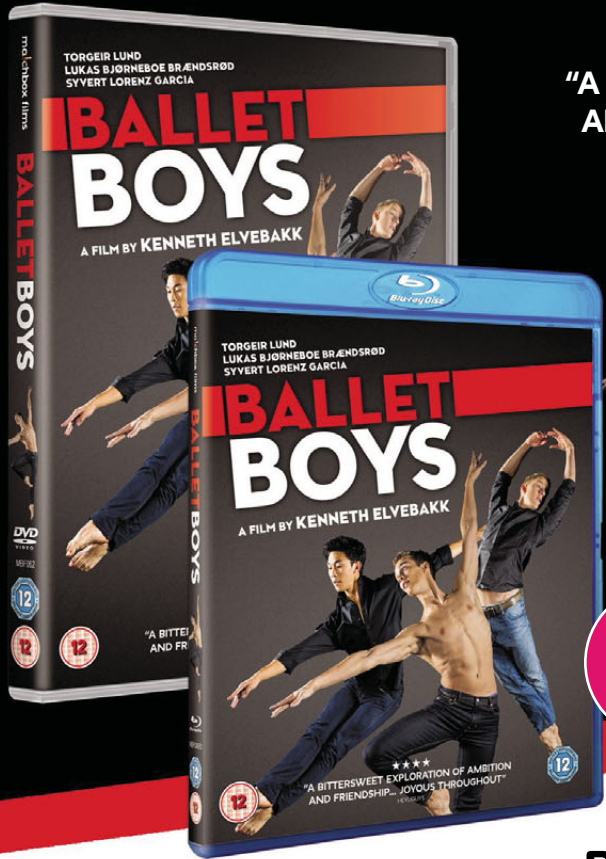
His words echo those of Susan Sontag, who in her 1964 essay ‘Piety without content’ took on the notion of amorphous religiosity without faith or observance, coming to the stern conclusion that one cannot be religious in general any more than one can speak language in general. “To be religious,” she writes, “is always to be in some sense an adherent to a specific symbolism and a specific historic community, whatever the interpretation of these symbols and this historic community the believer may adopt. It is to be involved in specific beliefs and practices, not just to give assent to the philosophic assertions that a being whom we may call God exists, that life has meaning. Religion is not equivalent to the theistic proposition.”

To write of ‘spiritual style’ without acknowledging of what that spirituality consists, from whence it is born, is misguided. God may be dead, and European religion may have passed away with him. But whatever their motivations, the likes of *Stations of the Cross* bear witness to the ways in which Christianity – its forms, its aesthetics, its ways of thinking and feeling – are constitutive of our collective subconscious. The value of suffering and guilt, the cult of love, the shock of materialism: these come to us from Christianity, they are in our blood, our bones. And just as *Ida's* buried skeletons inevitably will surface, so our religious past returns to haunt us. To paraphrase *Calvary's* Father James, Christianity's time will never be gone. ☺



***Stations of the Cross* is released in UK cinemas on 28 November and is reviewed on page 90**

CATHOLIC TASTES
Calvary (above), which centres on a week in the life of ‘good priest’ Father James (Brendan Gleeson) after he has been marked for death by a vengeful parishioner, is one of a number of recent films concerned with the trials and tribulations of the latter-day Church



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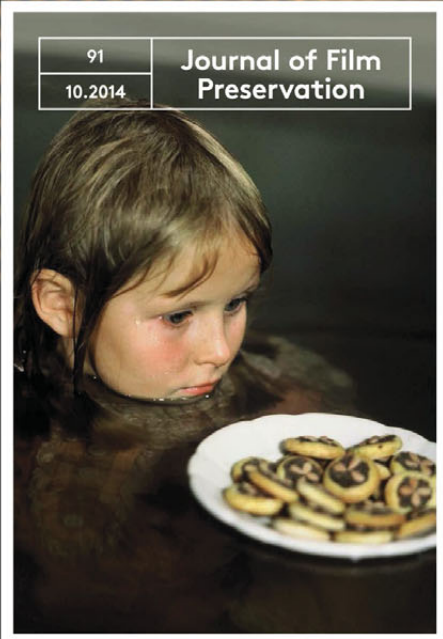
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PREVIEW

THE REBORN IDENTITY

Omer Fast is the latest artist to move into feature filmmaking, with an adaptation of Tom McCarthy's cult novel *Remainder*

By Kieron Corless

In Tom McCarthy's savagely brilliant novel *Remainder* (2005), the unnamed narrator, recovering from horrific injuries sustained when something ("Technology. Parts, bits") fell on him out of the sky, heads to his local cinema, the Brixton Ritzy, to watch *Mean Streets*. He's troubled by Robert De Niro's authentic mode of being, his unselfconscious movements, measured against which his own seem fake. "Even before the accident, if I'd been walking down the street just like De Niro, smoking a cigarette just like him, and even if it had lit first try, I'd still be thinking: *Here I am, walking down the street, smoking a cigarette, like someone in a film. See? Second-hand.*"

Ironically enough, he too will now be in a film, an adaptation of McCarthy's novel by artist Omer

Fast, shot in London and Germany earlier this year and slated for release in 2015, in which Tom Sturridge plays the still unnamed protagonist. His obsessive attempts after his accident to overcome trauma and memory loss, to reconnect with himself and the world, involve staging a series of re-enactments of isolated remembered moments, often quite banal, that occasionally rise to the surface and haunt him, the large financial settlement he receives facilitating their spiralling elaborateness and strangeness. In interviews on the book's publication, McCarthy spoke of cinema infiltrating the novel, and perhaps it's not a stretch to align those re-enactments with the work of a film director, albeit minus the cameras.

Ever since the film was announced, there's been considerable 'noise' around it; a cult novel and novelist teamed with a contemporary artist of considerable international repute. When I visit the production for an outdoor scene early in the film, shot on the south bank of the Thames near Westminster Bridge, Fast turns out to be relaxed company, affable and self-deprecating, but every now and then in our conversation he throws

in comments that suggest a degree of hesitancy and struggle. He tells me about a newspaper cartoon he once saw, of two sheep chewing rolls of film. One says to the other: "I thought the book was better." It's a difficult balancing act; staying true to the novel but making something that stands up on its own, that isn't second-hand.

It transpires that McCarthy greatly admires Fast's work and suggested him for the project. Did he write the script? "No, he's way too smart and too independent to get himself mixed up in something this dirty and ruinous," jokes Fast. "He's always thought that the novel and the script should remain apart." He happily participated in a three-day brainstorm, though, which Fast then fed into his own script. It's intriguing just how much of a fit, almost uncannily so, Fast's

Fast's work as an artist is almost uncannily attuned to McCarthy's novel, equally preoccupied with ideas of trauma and re-enactment



Remake it new: Tom Sturridge plays the story's unnamed protagonist, an accident victim compelled to recreate the few memories he still has

ALL REMAINDER STILLS COURTESY TIGERLILY/CHAS HARRIS

own work is with McCarthy's vision in the book, his artistic practice much preoccupied with exploring ideas around trauma and re-enactment. The last Fast film I saw was the eerily beautiful and unsettling *5,000 Feet Is the Best*, at London's Imperial War Museum last year, about drone operators and their victims – more nasty stuff falling out of the sky. The film's disorienting, mesmerising repetitions-with-variations slowly, stealthily seemed to undermine what we understand as 'real'. A profound Lynchian unease pervaded the whole. I couldn't get it out of my head for weeks after seeing it.

We fall to discussing Fast's work in general. "A lot of it deals with the vacuum that's created after someone has been through a traumatic event, and the way that people try to reconnect to themselves, family, friends, society, their lives, memories in this case, when there's been such a rupture and disruption. I see that disruption as a wonderful moment in a sense, as a reawakening, possibly a creative moment, as indeed it is for this character." The protagonist is still a long way away from anything wonderful in the scene being shot. It's a wet, freezing May evening by the river, feeling more like November, and that sense of disjunction hovers over proceedings. Sturridge is sitting on a bench next to St Thomas's hospital, his character being gently spoon-fed 'wise' advice by a honey-toned doctor.

"I've tried very hard to go for a minimal palette as far as the character's expressive performance is concerned, how much he emotes and how much he's allowed to show," Fast explains. "He's been through an accident, he has a disability, a traumatic brain injury. He is literally a bit of a shell. We're dealing with someone who, on first appearance, might seem to be quite OK, quite normal, but on closer inspection he's probably not. It's a very delicate thing to do." This description is borne out by Sturridge's performance. I watch a couple of takes huddled round a tiny monitor with the rest of the small crew. It's only on the second take that I begin to register the subtleties, the hesitancy, the not-quite-thereness of it. There's a sudden tug of sadness too.

There's been something of a stampede from the art world into narrative filmmaking in the last few years, which no doubt entails some rethinking of working practices. How did Fast find the development process, replete with phrases like 'character's journey', 'backstory', 'empathy' and 'identification'? "I'm not used to it, and it often felt to me like group therapy, where you sit in a room and you say, 'Hi, my name is Omer Fast, and I'm really really really fucking this up. Will you please help me?'" I'm used to getting smaller sums of money from people who really couldn't care less about what I do, and the freedom that involves is wonderful. Those projects are immeasurably free and irresponsible. This process is entirely different. You're sitting in a room with several people who've read the book, are all keen on seeing a successful adaptation of it, and yet what that means *vis-à-vis* the actual substance might at some points diverge – indeed, does diverge. I had some hard lessons to learn, which did involve 'sympathy' for the protagonist, and addressing how much of his disconnectedness and freakishness we can preserve." Nevertheless,



'This is not for the fainthearted': Omer Fast

the changes Fast has made in the transition from book to screen, which he describes as "a perversion of the novel", are radical and ingenious; led more by images, as you'd expect, which in turn prompted a complete rethink of the book's linear structure. And the notion of replicating the book's first-person viewpoint through a voiceover was summarily rejected.

But at the heart of the novel, the philosophical and conceptual substance of the matter, sits the notion of re-enactment, central to Fast's own art work too. Why has he been so repeatedly drawn to it? "Re-enactment allows for two things to happen: to delve into our understanding of the past, and make the past something which is more performative," he explains. "On the other hand, there's this weird aesthetic that happens if you introduce this notion of repetition into a narrative. You allow an audience to see something more than once. There's something very musical about that... It can introduce a theme, and a variation in the changes that occur as something is repeated, so you're beginning to create layers and a tension. You can begin to create a history within the story. It opens up two interesting perspectives: one is psychological, and possibly

social and historical; and of course the other one is, depending on the subject, very formal and much more related to the aesthetics of the story. If you're going to film something over and over again, and vary the angle, you're inevitably getting into aesthetic decisions that could give an aesthetic charge or pleasure, that may or may not jibe with the subject you've chosen."

Formal matters aside, did Fast experience an emotional response to the novel? After all, we're talking about one of the strangest, most alienated and disembodied characters in recent fiction; someone fascinating, but hard to get a fix on. "I thought what was really nice at the end of the book, and which I'm trying to preserve – albeit doing something more radical with the narrative structure and the temporality of the story – is this notion of grace. I'm not a religious person and it's difficult for me to get into that without being immediately critical, but I felt that what was emotional in the book was more about the obsessive efforts the protagonist undergoes to realise something, and not just something about himself but to actually create something, and this is very close to anyone who is working in a creative career or process; but also the notion of grace, the really, really narrow space that's opened up at the end of the book, and I think the film too, for that, for this pause, this deliverance; the slight opening up of the landscape in front of someone after all that work."

Fast is called over to deal with something in the scene and I prepare to head off somewhere warm. Before I go, I have to ask: would he do this again. "Not any time soon," he admits ruefully. "This is not for the fainthearted. I don't think I'm the right type for this kind of work. I like my short projects. I have a ton of freedom in them and they're not as painful. But this is a challenge, and it's quite a wonderful chance to see a 100-page script and a more elaborately articulated world come together via this giant collaborative enterprise. It's a huge privilege to do something like this, and it all really starts with Tom just trusting me. But it's also fucking confusing." ☹

i Remainder will be released in UK cinemas in autumn 2015



I'm not there: the strangeness of the main character proved a challenge in terms of fostering empathy

SILENT HOPE

In *40 Days of Silence*, an Uzbek girl's vow not to speak is underwritten by a bold experimental score that eschews tradition and nature

By Frances Morgan

What do you hear when your own voice is quieted? In the recent Uzbek film *40 Days of Silence*, Bibicha, a young girl in a remote mountain village, forges her adult self – you could say she finds her voice – by vowing not to speak for 40 days, a practice known in Central Asia as *chilla*. The search for wisdom through retreat and meditation spans millennia, from shamanic rituals to self-improvement programmes that promise a respite from daily anxieties. Saodat Ismailova's haunting film balances the historical weight of this ancient undertaking with the tensions of doing it in the present day in a community in which tradition is both a solace and a bind, especially for its women and girls.

Ismailova has also made a film about listening. Bibicha (Rushana Sadikova) moves through the 40-day silence acutely aware of the sounds around her. Her *chilla* is not a luxurious retreat 'experience' as it might be for Western secular seekers of enlightenment – she barely has her own room at her grandmother's house, where she has chosen to take her vow. Her aunt has reluctantly come home from the city where she would much rather be, and the tinny melodies of her text message alerts and romantic pop songs interrupt the long nights; off-camera, Bibicha's mother argues with the grandmother about Bibicha's choice, fearing for her sanity, while her daughter eavesdrops. Small sounds – breath, eating, rain, the distant noise of animals and mining machinery – are amplified, cutting through the still, cold air of the mountaintop. As Bibicha delves deeper into silence, however, the real voices and sounds she hears mingle with those of her imagination. A monologue voiced by her grandmother seems to come from the old radio on the window sill. She has a vision of her mother during pregnancy, and hears what sounds like her own foetal heartbeat.

The sound design by Ranko Paukovic is complemented by an electroacoustic soundtrack by Danish artist Jacob Kirkegaard. Kirkegaard is well-versed in the sounds of interiority, and what we hear when there is ostensibly nothing to hear. One of his best-known works is *Labyrinthitis* (2007), a composition/installation that explores the phenomenon of otoacoustic emissions, sounds generated within the inner ear. This seemingly impossible process happens when two particular frequencies are played at the same time; the distortion caused creates the third sound. For *Labyrinthitis* Kirkegaard used the sounds generated in his own inner ear as the basis for a composition, reproducing them at an audible level and combining them with more clashing frequencies to generate further sounds, resulting in a gradually unfolding sequence of descending tones. When the piece is installed, Kirkegaard sets up speakers in a spiral shape that reflects the structure of the cochlea, so the listener can move through the space as if drawn deeper into

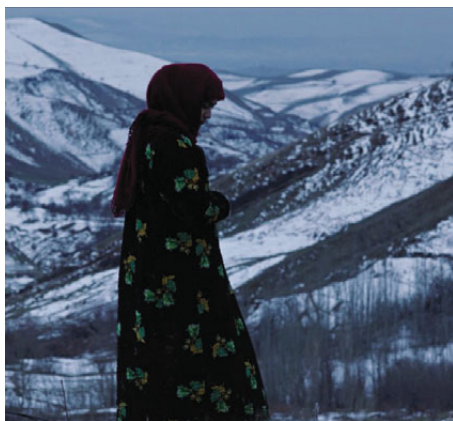


At the edge of the audible: Danish artist Jacob Kirkegaard composed the electroacoustic soundtrack

the ear itself. The slowly shifting tones he uses for *40 Days of Silence* recall this piece timbrally, but also conceptually, as the music is deployed at moments when Bibicha's dreams, imagination and inner life are to the fore – at the rare moments, too, when she is actually afforded some silence.

The choice of a predominantly electronic soundtrack for this film is an inspired one. The themes of tradition, spirituality, ancestral wisdom and geographical isolation all point to an ethnomusicologically 'correct' soundtrack using the natural soundscape of the area plus its indigenous music. These elements are used sparingly in the film's diegetic sound, but

alongside synthetic, alien-sounding drones that hover throughout like long clouds over the mountains; elsewhere, there is a faint suggestion of bells or flutes in the music, but they are at the very least heavily processed, if not electronically generated. At times Kirkegaard's soundtrack hovers on the edge of silence itself. The composer favours pitches at the outer reaches of what the ear can comfortably hear. In a track titled 'Cave' on the recent release of the soundtrack album on the VON Archives label, deep swells of sub bass that are felt rather than heard pulse slowly beneath distant, barely-there metallic tones; the impression is of a vast, mysterious



40 Days of Silence

The slowly shifting tones of the music are deployed at moments when dreams, imagination and inner life are to the fore

space, a vista that could stand in most obviously for the film's remote location, but also hints at the psychological depth of the narrative.

While *40 Days of Silence* ends ambiguously, it does so positively, with Bibicha smiling into sunshine, having achieved her goal; the music likewise offers a simple, skeletal melody that emerges tentatively from the abstraction of the rest of the soundtrack. But the music's foreboding atmospheres, combined with disturbing dream sequences that hint at past trauma, tell us that Bibicha's search for autonomy or understanding



The cover of the film's soundtrack album

is precarious. It's even, in the context of the highly traditional world she lives in, dangerous. As she communes with her ancestors, she is not reassured – her grandmother's stories, narrated in a calm voice, are of child marriage, war, violence and loss. She observes her aunt's sadness and the tension between her urban and rural lives, and experiences her surroundings with a newly found intensity that almost destroys her. The womanhood she will attain at the end of her silence seems full of fear and hardship, for all its warmth and community. As the film ends you find yourself asking where her quest will take her – back to the fold, or far away from it? 📍

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA



Before World War I, concerns over German military power spurred an invasion-themed science-fiction cycle

By John Oliver

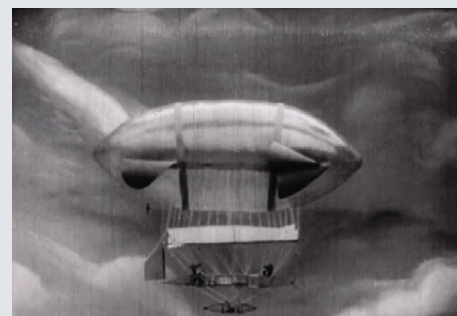
The abiding influence of H.G. Wells permeates 'Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder', the BFI's two-month-long celebration of film and television science fiction. Considering the contemporary popularity of the author's 'scientific romance' novels, it is little surprise that a range of the subjects explored in his works was appropriated by early British science-fiction cinema. Wells's influence can be felt in the titular substance of *The Professor's Anti-Gravitational Fluid* (1908), for example, or the growth serum in *Father's Baby Boy* (1909), or the invisibility featured in *The Invisible Dog* (1909) and *Professor Hoskin's Patent Hustler* (1914). Despite the popularity of Wells's 1898 novel *The War of the Worlds*, however, alien invasions and extraterrestrial encounters were conspicuous by their absence. There were invasions in early British science-fiction cinema, but they originated closer to home.

The near-future invasion story, in which Britain is assailed by foreign hordes of invariably Germanic extraction, can be traced back to Lieutenant-Colonel George Tomkyns Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* (1871). Describing the successful invasion of Britain by a superior German force, the pamphlet's success initiated a trend of novels that lasted well into the next century. The near-future invasion theme reached British cinemas in 1909, the release of three such films in that year possibly being related to the 'Naval Scare' that erupted in March, when debates in parliament over escalating expenditure on ship-building reignited public concerns over the growing military power of Germany.

The Invaders (1909) set the template with a foreign invading force (seemingly unnamed but we know who) successfully routed by the territorial army after occupying the house of the film's heroine. *The Airship Destroyer* (1909), with its fleet of enemy airships attacking England, may have been inspired not just by concerns over Britain's defence but by Wells's 1908 novel *The War in the Air*, which prophesied the destruction of cities by airship bombing raids. (Louis Blériot's historic flight across the English Channel in July 1909 may also have had the psychological effect of making Britain appear more susceptible to attack and invasion.) Little is presently known about the third film, *England Invaded* (1909), other than that it featured Leo Stormont, a music-hall artiste known for his singing of patriotic songs.

Although the possibility of aerial conflict and bombardment was gaining traction in the public consciousness, and was to feature in such non-invasion films as *The Aerial Submarine* (1910) and *The Aerial Anarchists*

In early British sci-fi cinema, alien invasions were conspicuous by their absence



Watch the skies: *The Airship Destroyer* (1909)

(1911), it does not appear to have featured in a near-future invasion film again until World War I initiated a second flurry of such titles. Although the first of these, *England's Menace* (1914), depicting the exploits of a young girl as she foils the invasion plans of an unnamed foreign power, was released in June, just prior to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the remaining films – at least those that have been identified – appeared after the outbreak of war. Unsurprisingly, some shared an anti-pacifist theme. *For the Empire* (1914), *Wake Up! Or, a Dream of Tomorrow* (1914) and *An Englishman's Home* (1914, based on a play by Guy du Maurier first staged in that key year, 1909) all feature pacifist characters, including a vicar in *For the Empire*, who become convinced of the necessity of war after having directly experienced – or, in the case of the second film, dreamed of – life under an invading army.

If England Were Invaded (1914), based on a story by the prolific future-war author William Le Queux, features a typical scenario with the British army successfully repelling a German invasion force that, after landing on the Norfolk coast, occupies the home of the lead character (Denis Gifford in *The British Film Catalogue: Fiction Film* states that this film, released in late 1914, was made the previous year).

The invasion forces in those films presumably arrived by sea – none of the titles in this second phase of films are known to survive – but *The Great German North Sea Tunnel* (1914) posits another method by which the Germans could invade: tunnelling all the way from Germany. Lancelot Speed's later animated film *The U Tube* (1917) featured a similar enterprise, but one treated in a humorous vein.

Other than the late arrival of *The U Tube*, near-future invasion films appear to have run their course by 1915, with only two films seemingly released that year: *Aerial Invasion Frustrated*, with the return of the airborne invader, and *When the Germans Came*. The production of the latter film, part of a series of comedies featuring Joe Evans in his Piecan character, seems to confirm the decline of the near-future invasion film: the invaders here appear to be part of a scheme cooked up to dispose of a nagging mother-in-law. When invaders have become part of a mother-in-law joke, you just know that their day is over. 📍

EXORCISE REGIME



Permanent night: Ventura and Vitalina Varela in *Horse Money*, Pedro Costa's exploration of the lingering trauma of Portugal's 1974 revolution

Pedro Costa's first fiction feature since 2006 is just one of the assaults on cinematic convention found in Toronto's Wavelengths strand

By Jason Anderson

With the urge to make the wisest use of a festival programme that's as generous – or, to be less charitable, as ridiculously overstuffed – as Toronto's comes a serious risk of travel fatigue. Constantly flitting between photogenic urban locales, treacherous global hot zones (or their facsimiles) and destinations that seem more reassuringly exotic to Western observers, viewers can't help but feel they're in every place and no place at once. Inevitably, their eyes grow less sensitive to the specifics of the environments on screen and more apt to perceive them as expressions of the same set of characteristics: urban and gritty, rural and quaint, scorched and threatening.

Pedro Costa has rarely presented stories or places that are so easy to parse. The Portuguese filmmaker continues to offer unfamiliar, deeply affecting and sometimes uncanny glimpses into the world of his subjects, the poor Cape Verdean immigrants who exist at Lisbon's geographic and economic periphery. His first fiction feature in eight years and one of the most startling entries in Toronto's Wavelengths programme, *Horse Money* is even more brazen than its celebrated predecessors when it comes to bending cinema's usual rules about the time and space(s) that characters occupy.

Indeed, Costa has resisted the prevalent interpretation of *Horse Money* as a sort of existential ghost story in which its central figure – a former construction worker named Ventura, whose weathered dignity made him both an anchor and entry point for Costa's *Colossal Youth* (2006) – has slipped beyond the boundaries of the material world into an eerie zone of permanent night. So evocative of German expressionism and the *noir*-ish horror films (and vice versa) that Val Lewton made for RKO in the 1940s, its chiaroscuro lighting of gloomy hospital corridors and menacing streetscapes would support such a take. The same is true of the film's most overtly surrealist sequence, which conveys Ventura's torments as he shares an elevator with a silent man who is suited and bronzed like a toy soldier. (Audiences of the 2012 omnibus film *Centro histórico* saw an early incarnation of this scene.)

Costa seems to have responded to the final destruction of Fontainhas – the slum where he filmed *Colossal Youth* and its companion works *Ossos* (1997) and *In Vanda's Room* (2000) – by replacing it with a more stylised environment of his own imagining. Yet to consign this vision to the realm of the fantastic is to devalue the starkly powerful elements of the real that *Horse Money* also contains. Instead, what we see here is a collision between cinematic history (with Straub hovering over the proceedings next to Lewton's ghost) and the authentic stories of suffering experienced by Costa's subjects. The latter can be discerned in the trembling of Ventura's hands, the result of a nervous disease that afflicts Costa's friend and leading man, or the emotionally devastating account of loss given by

Vitalina Varela, Ventura's companion, in another sequence set in a Kafkaesque bureaucracy.

Costa's intention with *Horse Money* was to expose and expunge the fear and trauma that the 1974 Portuguese revolution caused for Ventura and other members of Lisbon's chronically neglected immigrant population. Exorcism is the operative word here – 'Sweet Exorcist', a title borrowed from Curtis Mayfield, was the name of Costa's segment in *Centro histórico*. (Costa has a passion for radical-minded African-American music of the 1970s: he had originally enlisted Gil Scott-Heron to collaborate on *Horse Money*, but that plan was scuppered by the musician's death in 2011.)

During the introduction to *Horse Money*'s first public screening, Wavelengths programmer Andréa Picard described it as a film that "renews our faith in the art form". For once, the phrase wasn't hyperbole – nothing else at Toronto had anything like its unsettling, disorienting force.

That said, the latest edition of Wavelengths hardly suffered from a lack of strength, with *Horse Money* being presented alongside Lav Diaz's *From What Is Before*, Lisandro Alonso's *Jauja*, Eugène Green's *La Sapienza* and Matías Piñeiro's *The Princess of France*, all of which have already attracted praise in these pages.

Two further films having their North American premieres at Wavelengths after bows at Venice didn't match those standards, but had many moments of comparable boldness. *Fires on the Plain* – Tsukamoto Shinya's adaptation of the Ooka Shohei novel, previously adapted by Ichikawa Kon in 1959 with justly revered results – is an assaultive depiction of the horror

and obscenity of war that strives hard to be more horrific and obscene than most. It is the story of a Japanese soldier who endures illness, starvation and brutality on an island in the Philippines during the last months of World War II. As you might expect from the maker of the *Tetsuo* films, Tsukamoto amplifies the grisliest and most hallucinatory elements of Ooka's novel. Though subtlety is not the film's strong suit – it couldn't be, given the fixation on eviscerated bodies and cannibalistic urges – it's still Tsukamoto's most effective and fully realised effort in a decade.

The third feature by New York's Benny and Joshua Safdie, *Heaven Knows What* burrows deep into a city that bears little resemblance to the hipster wonderland seen on *Girls*. This is New York as experienced by Arielle Holmes, a homeless heroin addict who the Safdies befriended, after spying her in a subway station, and encouraged to write about her experiences. Her unpublished memoir was the basis for the script by the brothers and Ronald Bronstein, their collaborator on the lighter-hearted *Daddy Longlegs* (aka *Go Get Some Rosemary*, 2009). Holmes plays a fictionalised version of herself, an alternately wilful and self-destructive young woman caught in a junkie's relentless cycle of scoring and scamming as she tries to claw her way out of a bad romance with her abusive metalhead boyfriend (Caleb Landry Jones of *X-Men: First Class* and *Antiviral*). A stylistic descendant of Jerry Schatzberg's *The Panic in Needle Park* (1971), *Heaven Knows What* can be gruelling but is remarkable for the volatile energy exuded by the cast (many of them bona-fide street youths), Sean Price Williams's nimble camerawork, and a soundtrack of bruising 70s electronica by Isao Tomita and Tangerine Dream.

With its drive to create the most fiercely naturalistic representation possible of Holmes's experience, *Heaven Knows What* ends up closer in style to a conventional documentary than did many of the nominally non-fiction selections in the *Wavelengths* programme. The most playful of these is *Episode of the Sea*, a delightful black-and-white curio that the Dutch duo Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan made in collaboration with the inhabitants of Urk, a town in central Netherlands that was an island fishing village until the government drained the surrounding inland sea to create new farmland. Nevertheless, the citizens have steadfastly maintained their working lives as hardy North Sea fisherfolk while preserving their distinct cultural identity and dialect. Over two years of shooting,



Heaven Knows What

van Brummelen and de Haan developed an array of scenes that convey their subjects' attitude of defiance toward the economic and social pressures bearing down on their community. With blank-faced residents declaiming against restrictive European fishing policies, *Episode of the Sea* feels like a mix of ethnographic study and community theatre project as directed by Aki Kaurismäki. Many of the best jokes are contained in the droll passages of text by the filmmakers, who concede that their dedication to shooting on fast-disappearing film stock is evidence of the same stubbornly antiquated sensibility they see in the people of Urk.

The experience of reading is also of paramount importance in *Le Beau Danger*, German filmmaker René Frölke's suitably complex portrait of Romanian writer Norman Manea. Frölke intersperses meaty excerpts from Manea's essays, memoirs and novels with scenes of their rumpled author appearing at book fairs and on Italian talk shows and meeting the many demands placed on public intellectuals. In the process, the film conveys much that's ineffable about the trauma of exile and the gap between a writer's public and private selves. Just as interesting to Frölke are the interpretative processes for his film's viewers as they navigate the spaces that open up between these images and Manea's clear-eyed accounts of despair and deprivation as experienced at other points in recent European history.

An equally provocative essay film by the Seoul-born, US-based artist and filmmaker

'Fires on the Plain' is a depiction of the horror and obscenity of war that strives hard to be more horrific and obscene than most

Soon-Mi Yoo, *Songs from the North* is similarly incisive and uncommonly unsensationalistic in its consideration of the North Korean mindset. Weaving together grimly amusing snatches of cultural propaganda, archival footage and video that the artist shot (sometimes clandestinely) during three trips north of the DMZ, Yoo skirts the tendency to ridicule the people who must endure the country's ceaseless stream of patriotic prattle and paternalistic myth-spinning. Perhaps that's because she refuses to see them as dupes or alien others, largely because her own feelings about the North are rooted in her relationship with her father, a leftist law student who stayed behind when his comrades headed north after the war.

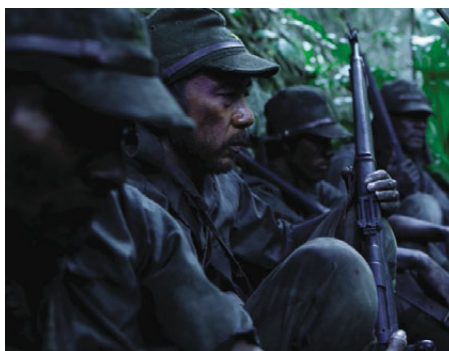
Another personal reflection on the pain, fear and suspicion that are born of political and social division, *The Policeman's House* (*Beit Ha'Shoter*) is a 25-minute video in which visual artist and filmmaker Mich'ael Zupraner reflects on his very thorny position as both an Israeli Jew living in the Palestinian city of Hebron and the occupant of a small white house that has been of great strategic and symbolic importance to his Arab and Jewish neighbours alike. Again avoiding the polemical elements common to films from either side of the conflict, Zupraner makes deft use of multiple screens as a visual counterpoint for the irresolvable divides in his own thinking and feelings as well as the rigidity of the physical and psychological borders that stymie his community.

Zupraner's film is also a testament to the strength and breadth of short works in *Wavelengths*. (In fact, the strand had been one of only two at Toronto to feature shorts until this year's addition of an international slate, headlined by a new short by Claire Denis.) A superb programme of films by Portuguese directors suggests that Costa is hardly alone among his compatriots when it comes to venturing beyond boundaries and upending expectations. *The Old Man of Belem*, for instance, is a typically masterful and drollly amusing contribution by Manoel de Oliveira that entails an imagined meeting in the garden of eternity between four giants of the European literary canon – Luís Vaz de Camões, Miguel de Cervantes, Camilo Castelo Branco and Teixeira de Pascoas – and a lively discourse on the vagaries of fate as they are related in their respective oeuvres.

Though the 16th-century poet is on his best behaviour in De Oliveira's film, Camões becomes a far more anarchic figure for the purposes of Gabriel Abrantes. The US-born, Lisbon-based artist and filmmaker showed a similarly refreshing lack of veneration for Manet's masterpiece in his 16mm diptych *Olympia I & II* (2006); his latest, *Taprobana*, is a scabrously funny, handsomely mounted fantasy that recasts Camões's political and artistic struggles during his banishment to what we now call Sri Lanka in enthusiastically scurrilous and decidedly coprophilic terms. A shipwreck, frolicking nude muses and the rescue of the Portuguese language from certain doom all figure in the ensuing action, which marries a rare degree of Python-worthy lunacy to headier themes. We last see Camões at a boundary point between heaven and hell – as with poor Ventura, it's hardly a foregone conclusion as to which direction he longs to go. 📍



The Old Man of Belem



Fires on the Plain

"Filmmaking of the first order"

Geoff Andrew, LONDON FILM FESTIVAL



"A stunning picture... Bilginer gives a magnificent performance."

Xan Brooks, THE GUARDIAN

"Beautiful, bold, intently serious."

Robbie Collin, THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

PALME D'OR
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

"Superbly acted"

Jonathan Romney, THE OBSERVER

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Justin Chang, VARIETY

"The film is a tour de force of writing, acting and subtly meticulous mise-en-scène... Gorgeous to look at, and packed with astute psychological, social and ethical insights... a marvellous achievement"

Geoff Andrew, SIGHT & SOUND

IN CINEMAS NOVEMBER 21

PRODUCED BY ZEYNEP ÖZBATUR ATAKAN CO-PRODUCED BY ALEXANDRE MALLET-GUY MUSTAFA DOK WITH HALUK BILGINER MELİSA SOZEN DEMET ARBAĞ AYBERK BEKCAN SERHAT KILIÇ TAMER LEVENT NADİR SARIBACAK MEHMET ALLI NUROĞLU AND NEJATİ İSLER SCREENPLAY BY EBRU CEYLAN NURİ BİLGE CEYLAN
INSPIRED BY THE SHORT STORIES BY ANTON CHEKHOV DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GÖKHAN TIRYAKI ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ÖZGÜR SEVİMLİ ART DIRECTOR GANİZE KÜS EDITOR NURİ BİLGE CEYLAN BORA GÖKSİNGİR SOUND ANDREAS MÜCKE MİSYİKA THOMAS ROBERT BENOÎT GARGONNE LARS GINZEL
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER SEZGİN ÜSTÜN NATIONAL CO-PRODUCERS MUZAFFER YILDIRIM MUĞE KOLAT OLIVIER PÉREZ REMİ BURAH NURİ BİLGE CEYLAN ZEYNEP ÖZBATUR MEMENTO FILMS PRODUCTION BRETON FILM PRODUCTION CO-PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH ARTE FRANCE CINEMA
MAR'S ENTERTAINMENT GROUP - IMAJ SUPPORTED BY EURIMAGES - MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND TOURISM (REPUBLIC OF TURKEY) - ARTE FRANCE - MEDIENBOARD BERLIN BRANDENBURG - WORLD CINEMA SUPPORT - CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE
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Reviews



76 **The Imitation Game**

The eager-to-please screenplay plays its own imitation game, in being beholden to formula ('A Beautiful Mind' for one) – a manufactured quality that occasionally creeps into Benedict Cumberbatch's otherwise committed, fastidious performance



58 Films of the month



64 Films



94 Home Cinema



104 Books



Birth of a nation: a sequence featuring the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) lets us hear directly from the anti-colonial resistance movement

Concerning Violence

Sweden/Denmark/Finland/USA/Norway/
Germany 2014

Director: Göran Hugo Olsson

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Göran Hugo Olsson's *Concerning Violence* is the first major film to grapple with the work of the influential Martinican author and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon since Isaac Julien's biographical documentary *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1995). Whereas the earlier film took a holistic, if esoteric, approach to appraising Fanon's life and ideas (including his upbringing in Martinique, education in France and work in Algeria), the punchy *Concerning Violence* focuses on a specific sliver: the opening chapter of Fanon's classic text *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), in which the author posits the act of one nation colonising another as a form of pure, subjugating violence. Fanon also discusses violence – in the context of uprising and rebellion – as a means of liberation and physical, spiritual catharsis for the oppressed.

When Fanon's book was initially published in France, it was banned almost immediately by the authorities, who saw it as a recklessly incendiary glorification of violence. This negative view was only burnished by the book's preface, written by Fanon supporter Jean-

Paul Sartre, which wholeheartedly endorsed the thesis of violence as a cleansing act and, according to Fanon biographer David Macey, overshadowed the actual work. However, as the academic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains in the brief, informative contextual preface that begins Olsson's film, such a reading fails to appreciate Fanon's nuance; specifically, it neglects to address his anguish – rooted in the realities of his experiences in French-ruled Algeria – at the cyclical, decidedly non-glamorous tragedy of the very poorest people being reduced, and subjected, to violence.

Concerning Violence, then, represents a welcome attempt to reframe and interrogate an influential but highly contested historical text. As in his previous film, *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* (2011), Swedish director Olsson has raided the TV news archives of his home country and emerged with a fount of grainy, absorbing footage, presumably hitherto forgotten. He structures the material into nine chapters of varying length (the film's subtitle is *Nine Scenes from the Anti-Imperialistic Self-Defense*), and each focuses on a specific struggle for liberation in one of a number of African countries, including Angola, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Burkina Faso; the footage dates from the mid-1960s up to the late 1980s.

Though at first glance *Concerning Violence*

may seem almost utilitarian in its stark, unfussy formalism, Olsson puts his personal stamp on Fanon's work. Complementary passages from the text are narrated over the images by singer and activist Lauryn Hill, whose delivery – throaty and languid, but also somehow urgent and incantatory – seems designed to evoke the alacrity of the book's writing: Fanon was terminally ill with leukaemia when he set to work, and he composed and dictated it to his wife Josie in a remarkable ten-week spell. For a further rhetorical, stylishly pedagogical flourish, much of the text is simultaneously imposed on screen in a white serif font. At this year's Berlin



Original sins: Scandinavian missionaries

International Film Festival, Olsson mentioned that this device was inspired by the music video for Prince's state-of-the-nation anthem 'Sign o' the Times' (1987). Also notable is Neo Muyanga's subtle score of roiling, percussive jazz, augmented by peals of muted trumpet that ring out like warning clarions. This forceful stylistic unity, added to the binding agent of Fanon's torrentially persuasive and poetic language, ensures that *Concerning Violence* resounds as a far more cohesive statement than *The Black Power Mixtape*.

Olsson and his editing team structure *Concerning Violence* so that the archival passages comment on each other even as they are in dialogue with Fanon's text. Consider two back-to-back segments near the start. With Fanon's words, delivered by Hill ("For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists"), ringing in our ears, the film picks up with a black journalist, newly released from a five-year jail spell in Rhodesia. He speaks calmly of his realisation that, from slavery to colonialism, and up to the institutionalised racism and state-sanctioned torture in the country that would become Zimbabwe, the "black man is at the bottom of everything"; torture, he says, made him "feel indifferent". The following sequence, also set in Rhodesia, is an interview with a quietly seething white racist, rictus grin slashed across his face, who's unable to process the country's impending changes. For him, the servitude of the black man is a fact of life (he casually refers to his own servant as "you stupid thing"), and he seems bent on denying the country's majority blacks the most basic, humane privilege ("They all think they're going to own houses"). The inordinate, barely concealed aggression of the white man makes for a striking contrast with the measured, resigned tone of the black man, and this clash of registers underscores Fanon's urgency. By the time of the film's fourth segment, 'A World Cut in Two', even the most innocuous imagery – white settlers enjoying a game of bowls or golf while black servants quietly stand by – rumbles with volcanic potential.

Another striking feature of *Concerning Violence* is the choice of countries it features. Olsson's decision not to depict scenes of struggle in Algeria, where Fanon was associated with the National Liberation Front, is concomitant with his film's sensible avoidance, save for the short preface, of a biographical take on Fanon, instead favouring a broader perspective. As the academic Bhakti Shringarpure has pointed out, *Concerning Violence* focuses on decolonisation in Portuguese-speaking areas such as Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau, even though these countries represented a fraction of the global anti-colonial movement in an era when most colonies were under French or British rule. Yet Olsson doesn't let Sweden off the hook. One galling segment is a news documentary covering a strike by disgruntled workers at a Swedish-owned mining company in Liberia in 1966. It concludes with one striker being unceremoniously fired, driven away with his family and literally deposited in the middle of nowhere to face an uncertain future. His boss, a mild-mannered old Swedish man, doesn't even know why he was fired, but adds, "He was a very good boy". This sequence communicates the layered nature of violence inherent in colonialism — not just physical, but psychic and emotional.

Much of the footage Olsson has sourced is extraordinary on its own terms. The sequence

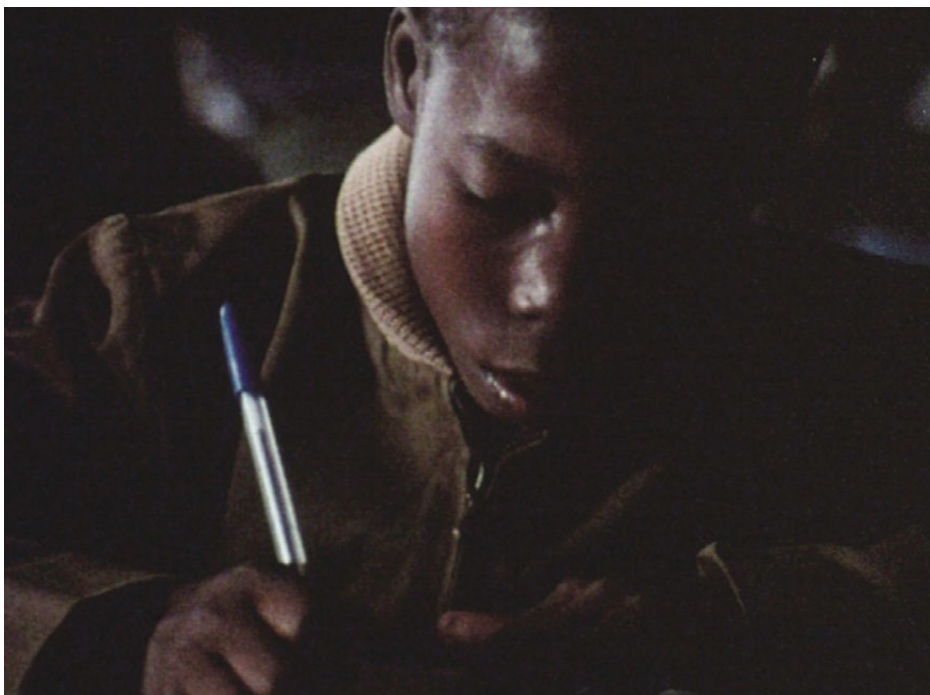
The director forces the viewer to face the devastating corporeal consequences of violence head-on, not simply in a theoretical sense

featuring interviews with the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) is especially valuable because we get to hear directly from the mouth of the resistance. Notably, Frelimo is a mixed-gender outfit, and it is women who are interviewed here ("There is no difference in rights. We are at the same level"). Thematically, this harks back to Spivak's preface, which makes a bold criticism of Fanon's work for failing to address sufficiently the "invisible long-term structures of gendering" in both colonised and coloniser. After journalists in Mozambique have delivered grave reports of the Portuguese colonial army burning down churches, schools and orphanages, the chapter concludes with the graphic, deeply upsetting image of an amputee mother breastfeeding her amputee baby.

Then, in one of Olsson's most stunning moves,

the Frelimo section segues into a brief chapter simply entitled 'Defeat'. Set to the haunting strains of a Spanish-language folk lament, it comprises nothing more than a montage of shattered, defeated Portuguese colonial soldiers gathered around the bloodied corpse of a colleague. Olsson's graphic juxtaposition represents the antithesis of Sartrean swashbuckle, and forces the viewer to face the devastating corporeal consequences of violence head-on, not simply in a theoretical sense. Here, Hill punches out Fanon's text ("At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction"), but the horrifying images force viewers actively to critique as they digest.

This disturbing, layered film is mercifully free of pat attempts to bring things up to date: chronologically speaking, it concludes in 1987. Yet there's no doubt that its final passage – in which Europe is described as "literally the creation of the third world", and America as a "monstrous" colonial power – is intended to give the viewer plenty to process with regard to contemporary nations still suffering the pronounced after-effects of colonisation. In many cases, Fanon's astringent words seem as relevant today as ever. **9**



The pen and the sword: the film addresses Frantz Fanon's exploration of violence in a colonial context

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Annika Rogell
Tobias Janson
Text
Frantz Fanon
Based on the book
The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon
Edited by
Michael Aaglund
Dino Jonsäter

Göran Hugo Olsson
Sophie Vukovic
Art Director
Stefania Malmsten
Music Composer
Neo Muyanga
Sound Design
Micke Nyström
©Story, Sveriges
Television, Louverture

Films, Final Cut for
Real, Helsinki Filmi
Production Companies
A Story production
Co-produced by
Louverture, Final Cut
for Real, Helsinki Filmi,
Sveriges Television
Supported by
Swedish Film

Institute, Finnish
Film Foundation,
Danish Film Institute,
YLE, DR K, Nordic
Film and TV Fund,
MEDIA Programme,
Sundance Institute
Documentary
Film Program
Presented by Cinetic
Media, Films Boutique

A film by Göran
Hugo Olsson

narrated by
Laurn Hill
preface by
**Gayatri Chakravorty
Spivak**

**In Colour and
Black and White**

**[1.33:1] and [1.78:1]
Part-subtitled**

Distributor
Dogwoof

A documentary based on the first chapter (entitled 'Concerning Violence') of the 1961 book 'The Wretched of the Earth' by Martinican psychiatrist and anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon. In nine segments, all comprising archival material sourced from Swedish television, the film explores various liberation struggles in African countries, including Angola, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Tanzania, Mozambique,

Guinea-Bissau and Burkina Faso. The footage covers a period from the 1960s to the 1980s. The singer Laurn Hill reads selected passages from 'Concerning Violence' over the images, and the words are often simultaneously imposed on the screen. The main body of the film is preceded by a short contextual preface by the academic and philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

The Homesman

USA/France 2014

Director: Tommy Lee Jones

Certificate 15 122m 33s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The Homesman has had a noticeably cooler reception from conservative critics than *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005), largely because Tommy Lee Jones's second movie as director is a good deal less generic than the first. (Jones has also made a couple of films for TV, in 1995 and 2011, neither seen by this reviewer.) Of course, *The Homesman* owes plenty to genre traditions. The central 'odd couple' relationship between a worldly man and a prim, religious-minded woman goes back at least to *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The African Queen* (1951) and probably much further, and the film as a whole has the look and tone of revisionist westerns of the 1970s. But the story's twists and emphases are often unexpected, and the shape of the narrative overall fits no genre template.

The film is adapted from a 1988 novel by Glendon Swarthout (1918-1992), a writer of Anglo-Dutch parentage whose other filmed books include *Where the Boys Are*, *Bless the Beasts and Children* and *The Shootist*. (Joseph H. Lewis's *7th Cavalry* is also drawn from a Swarthout short story.) The book has been a Hollywood property since it was published – Paul Newman figures prominently in its development-hell history – but its 'feminist' depiction of sexual issues would almost certainly have been compromised or even erased if it had been filmed earlier. Jones approaches it as a brokeback narrative, divided unequally between one man's selfish, this-is-all-there-is attitudes and one woman's god-fearing hope and idealism. The way the two antithetical philosophies play out, especially in the film's final half-hour, makes for a harsh and quite disturbing vision, unlike anything else in recent American cinema.

Jones starts with sketches of the hard-scrabble lives of settlers on the plains of Nebraska: pumping water from a well, ploughing the generally unyielding land, living in basic and minimally furnished wooden shacks, barely shielded from the elements. Before knowing who they are or how they will be placed in the story, we see vignettes of the four women whose plights will drive the narrative. Mary Bee Cuddy (Hilary Swank) is the only spinster, vulnerable but tough; her piety and bossiness scare off the neighbour she offers to marry, and her mimed piano-playing and slightly alarming singing voice don't help either. The other three have been driven insane by the marital demands of their husbands, by losing successive children to disease, or by the pressures to be 'feminine' in this miserable environment. The most startling vignettes show a man brutally screwing his wife upright in a barn, and a woman 'burying' her dead baby in an outdoor cesspit. The small community is largely Scandinavian but only notionally religious; the measure of one woman's derangement is that she can say little but the repeated phrase "God will strike you down". Jones and his co-writers make no sustained attempt to characterise the three women individually; all three are defined primarily by their gender-based predicaments. Jones says in a press-kit interview that he wanted to explore the female condition in the mid-19th-century American West "because I



Wagon train: Tommy Lee Jones as George Briggs and Hilary Swank as Mary Bee Cuddy

think it's the origin of the female condition today".

The challenge of transporting the three women back east, initially to a Methodist community in Hebron, Iowa, falls to Mary Bee when she volunteers to draw lots for the task in place of Vester Belknap, husband of one of the women. She has little sense of the potential hazards ahead until it's pointed out that she's likely to encounter rapists, killers and hostile American Indians en route. Her hook-up with the reprobate George Briggs (Jones), a scuzzy claim-jumper left to hang by vengeful farmers, is equally random but more fortuitous. She is pragmatic enough herself to realise that he

will need more to motivate him into riding shotgun on the journey than his gratitude to her for saving his life, so she pretends to send \$300 ahead to Hebron to reward him on arrival at their destination. This small knot of deception, greed and pragmatism sets up the 'odd couple' relationship which will dominate the film.

The journey itself, up to and across the Missouri River, fills the middle hour. You couldn't call it uneventful, but the film deliberately withholds the thrills and spills of traditional westerns: there's no exulting in the virgin landscape, no sense of heroic endeavour, and the small crises are not played as action set pieces.



Speed the plough: Hilary Swank



Gun crazy: Tim Blake Nelson, Tommy Lee Jones



of grace, but when he burns down the Fairfield Hotel because its unctuous and probably criminal proprietor Aloysius Duffy (James Spader) refuses him and the women a night's rest, his act of revenge is clearly driven by something more than self-interest. His gains in moral fibre, though, are snatched away from him on arrival in Hebron, where he entrusts the women to the care of the smug Altha Carter (Meryl Streep, the acme of skin-deep gentility) and is sent on his way as if nothing had happened. He spends the reward money on a smart new suit, a bath and a carved headstone for Mary Bee... and then loses the last when he gets drunk on a riverboat. Briggs, in short, ends up not far from where he began: living for the moment, believing in nothing, rooting around for a better life. The literal and metaphorical journeys he has been on are the film's real subjects, and the sad truth he learns is existential.

There's a curious mismatch between the film's rather old-fashioned style and sensibility and its modernist subject and approach to plot. It's at once rather out of time and of the moment. The storyline isn't picaresque but it is daringly episodic, particularly in its opening and closing stages, and Jones leaves the viewer remarkably free to draw inferences from the way the episodes are strung together. Meanings and implications are never signposted, but Jones succeeds completely in redefining the psychological western. George Briggs was born to survive in the film's godless universe, and his encounters with other folk – the god-fearing, the criminal, the insane, the depraved, the genteel – ultimately push him into reverting to type. But he does have new clothes to show for the experience. ☺

There's a curious mismatch between the film's rather old-fashioned style and its modernist subject. It's at once out of time and of the moment

brief standoff with a group of young injun braves, presented as excitable delinquents, is deflected when Briggs cleverly gives them a horse to chase; when one of the women escapes and Briggs finds her hitched up with a solitary chancer, she saves Briggs the trouble of dealing with her 'rescuer' by killing him herself; and Mary Bee's obstinacy gets her left behind and lost for a day. The real drama running through these scenes is the relationship between Mary Bee and Briggs, each edging closer to the other; the three women say little but watch intently, their expressions unreadable until they widen their eyes at the sight of Mary Bee politely requesting Briggs to take her naked body. (Briggs has already refused her offer of marriage, and initially refuses sex too; he relents only when she pleads, "Spare me my dignity, sir.")

Typically, the film doesn't try to explain Mary Bee's suddenly urgent desire to lose her virginity... or her subsequent suicide. Her death three-quarters of the way through the film is as surprising as Marion Crane's in *Psycho*, and it hangs over the rest of the film in much the same way. It transforms Briggs, whose first impulse is to abandon the women (especially when he finds his reward money hidden in Mary Bee's bag) but who needs little persuading to complete Mary Bee's task. It's not that he attains anything like a state

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Peter Brant
Brian Kennedy
Luc Besson
Screenplay
Tommy Lee Jones
Kieran Fitzgerald
Wesley A. Oliver
Based on the novel by
Glendon Swarthout
Director of
Photography
Rodrigo Prieto
Editor
Roberto Silvi
Production Designer

Merideth Boswell
Music
Marco Beltrami
Sound Mixer
José Antonio García
Costume Designer
Lahly Poore-Ericson

©The Homesman
Limited Partnership
Production
Companies
EuropaCorp presents
in association
with Peter Brant,
The Javelina Film

Company and Ithaca
Films a Michael
Fitzgerald and Tommy
Lee Jones production
Executive Producers
Deborah Dobson Bach
G. Hughes Abell
Richard Romero

Cast
Tommy Lee Jones
George Briggs
Hilary Swank
Mary Bee Cuddy
Jo Harvey Allen

Mrs Polhemus
Barry Corbin
Buster Shaver
David Dencik
Thor Svendsen
William Fichtner
Vester Belknap
Grace Gummer
Arabella Sours
Evan Jones
Bob Giffen
Caroline Lagerfelt
Netti Svendsen
John Lithgow
Reverend Alfred Dowd
Tim Blake Nelson

freighter
Miranda Otto
Theoline Belknap
Jesse Plemons
Garn Sours
Sonja Richter
Gro Svendsen
James Spader
Aloysius Duffy
Hailee Steinfeld
Tabitha Hutchinson
Meryl Streep
Altha Carter

Dolby Digital
In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

Nebraska, 1855. Devout spinster Mary Bee Cuddy farms her own smallholding and looks for a husband. Reverend Dowd announces that three women in the small community have gone insane and need to be taken back to Hebron, Iowa, for care; when Vester Belknap (husband of one of them) refuses to escort them, Mary Bee volunteers for the job. She is preparing for the arduous 400-mile trip when she encounters claim-jumper George Briggs, left to hang under a tree; she frees him on his promise that he will ride shotgun on the journey, and mails \$300 ahead as his reward for completing the task. They set off in a customised wagon, beset by fears and privations. Briggs fends off a party of hostile Native Americans by giving them

Mary Bee's horse. One woman escapes, but kills her rescuer when Briggs catches up with them. Mary Bee asks Briggs to marry her; when he refuses, she gives him her virginity anyway and next morning hangs herself. Briggs finds the unmailed \$300 among her effects and tries to abandon the women, but relents. They seek one night's shelter in the Fairfield Hotel; when proprietor Aloysius Duffy refuses them, Briggs returns and burns the place down. On arrival in Hebron, Briggs turns the women over to the care of Methodist minister's wife Altha Carter. He uses the \$300 to buy a smart new outfit and get a headstone carved for Mary Bee's grave, but then loses himself in liquor and song on a riverboat.

Sacro GRA

Italy/France 2013

Director: Gianfranco Rosi

Certificate 15 95m 12s

Reviewed by Jordan Cronk

Amid a wave of increased visibility for Italian output, *Sacro GRA*'s Golden Lion victory at the 2013 Venice Film Festival stands as the most unexpected triumph in the country's recent run of cinema accolades. Next to the gritty intensity and sweeping expressionism of, respectively, Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra* (2008) and *Reality* (2012), or the gaudy opulence of Paolo Sorrentino's Oscar-winning *The Great Beauty* (2013), the unassuming, observational nature of director Gianfranco Rosi's latest missive is almost strikingly modest. But then, save for a slight expansion in scale, *Sacro GRA* doesn't represent any kind of dramatic break in Rosi's established approach. If anything, the film's Golden Lion win – the first time in Venice's history that its top prize has been awarded to a documentary – is more significant for the way it underscores how rare it is for a major festival jury to give awards to non-fiction filmmaking than it is in revealing any particular evolution on the part of its director.

The Grande Raccordo Anulare motorway – the GRA of the film's title, which translates literally as 'Holy GRA' – provides both a physical and allegorical framework for Rosi's images. And accordingly the image seems to be Rosi's primary mode of articulation here. While the GRA, an unbroken, ring-shaped road circling Rome ("Like a ring around Saturn"), is employed as the film's nominal subject, it consistently cedes command to community and countryside alike. Rosi's lens, mostly fixed at a remove, yet occasionally inquisitive as life spills into the natural environments surrounding the GRA, captures the activity occurring along the highway's many miles in a serene, empirical manner likely to be familiar to anyone who has paid even the slightest attention to contemporary non-fiction or non-narrative filmmaking. The text of the film, despite a selection of recurring individuals, is thus expressed primarily through its images – flat, desaturated digital compositions that Rosi wisely arranges as a mostly spartan procession of architectural, environmental and anthropological elements.

This geographical structuring conceit may correctly imply some sort of grand thematic schema, but there's little apart from the proximity of the GRA itself – which is heard or seen in the distance of many shots – to help visually or aurally integrate the individual components of each sequence into Rosi's greater aesthetic construction, which proceeds in a democratic, though not entirely coherent, fashion. In its perhaps overly egalitarian approach to the elemental and physiological properties of life along the GRA, the film evinces a vaguely ethnographic sensibility. The operative word being vague, as Rosi never grants the viewer the opportunity to fully absorb, or even make tangential connections between, the landscape and the personalities to which his camera is drawn. Perhaps privileged moments with his subjects were at a premium, but in sacrificing more intimate representation for what will likely be read as metaphor – and in an effort, it would seem, to preserve some state-of-Italian-life-today address – Rosi can only suggest each approach, ultimately



On the road: *Sacro GRA* drops in on the lives of some of those living in close proximity to the motorway

Rosi's lens, mostly fixed at a remove, captures the activity occurring along the GRA motorway's many miles in a serene, empirical manner

hindering himself from elaborating on either.

The results are therefore innately contradictory, as *Sacro GRA* is at its most engaging when the everyday characters seen on screen begin to assert their various personalities, politics and philosophies. Among others, there's the paramedic whom we follow in states of both emergency and domesticity; the commerce-conscious eel fisherman pushing against the



A bug's life: recording the sounds of harmful weevil larvae burrowing through the country's palm trees



tide of globalisation; the pair of middle-aged, down-and-out women who live in an RV just off the highway; the enterprising, cigar-chomping patriarch who rents his family's mansion out to film, television and theatre productions; the ageing father and grown daughter whom we glimpse from outside their apartment window discussing topics both personal and perfunctory; and the environmental researcher who records the sounds of harmful weevil larvae burrowing their way through the country's palm trees. Each of these individuals is introduced, set aside and then returned to at some point in the film, though the rotation itself, apart from the inherent circular motif, follows no analytic logic and the visual presentation of each sequence – sometimes detached, at other times probing – differs depending on seemingly any factor, from the given subject's lifestyle to the chosen location.

While no greater contextual information is offered, it's implied that these people are meant to represent any number of greater Italian social castes, and by that rationale it's a fairly diverse group of participants. In the absence of descriptive text or narration, the environmental researcher helpfully provides the film with a thematically sound, lightly philosophical dimension. While recording and listening, eyes often closed, to the sounds of the red palm weevil, he ruminates on the insects' "highly organised social structure",

comparing the potential fate of the palms to that of a man's soul. Elsewhere, from a small room in their apartment, the father-daughter duo, always shot from the same high-angled vantage outside their bedroom window, discuss wine, airline travel, the neighbours and the daughter's marriage prospects. The fisherman, meanwhile, complains about the prospects of importing eels from other countries, while his assistants sit quietly by, paying little attention to his grievances – even his wife, who appears later in the film, would rather read tabloid magazines than talk business. There are other individuals introduced – a pair of go-go dancers, a prostitute, an aspiring local DJ – but apart from a few minutes of screen time, their purpose and prospects are left up to the imagination of the viewer.

For the sake of comparison, one might look to Rosi's previous film, the harrowing, highly austere *El Sicario, Room 164* (2010), which benefited greatly from its self-imposed focus. Set within a single hotel room on the US/Mexico border, *El Sicario* consists entirely of recollections from an anonymous, hooded Sicarii assassin who sits before the camera and draws diagrams detailing the untold number of abductions, tortures and murders he's committed over the years (many in the very same room in which the film is shot) on behalf of both drug cartels and the Chihuahua state

police. In narrowing his purview and shrewdly limiting the film's production to only the most elemental constituents, Rosi was able with *El Sicario* to formulate a narrative and aesthetic approach with the capacity to simultaneously elicit empathy and assert its topicality without excusing the heinous actions of his subject in the process. For better or worse, in its attempt to paint a broader view of contemporary Italian society, *Sacro GRA* never fully establishes a similarly intimate focus for the viewer.

This disconnect could partially be Rosi's intention. The director claims the film was inspired by Italo Calvino's 1972 novel *Invisible Cities*, in which the explorer Marco Polo poetically chronicles his lifetime of travels to the ageing Chinese emperor Kublai Khan through metaphysical observations and inquiries into cities and borders, language and memories, fears and desires. These more abstract concepts ("The city does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand") do find an analogue in the film's visual syntax, which positions shots of landscapes, skylines and architecture between its scenes of interior and vocational activity. In as much as images of everyday beauty and banality can conjure feelings of transience and existential reckoning, these moments are evocative, if not exactly effective. Perhaps if any of his subjects had been granted enough time to elaborate on their respective plights or professions, then Rosi's thesis, coupled with these mildly expressive images, might have translated in fuller, more insightful form. The word 'snapshot' is often used as shorthand to describe films that take communities, countries or cultures as their subject. In the case of *Sacro GRA*, the term defines both the depth of its vision and the extent of its scope. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Marco Visalberghi
From an original idea
by Nicolò Bassetti
Photography
Gianfranco Rosi
Editor
Jacopo Quadri
Sound
Gianfranco Rosi

©Doclab, La Femme
Endormie, Officine
UBU Distribuzione
**Production
Companies**
Marco Visalberghi
presents a
co-production of

Doclab, La Femme
Endormie
with Rai Cinema
With the financial
support of the
Direzione Generale
per il Cinema
With the support of
Regione Lazio, Filas,
Roma Lazio Film
Commission, CNC –
Centre National de
Cinematographie
With the assistance
of La Procirop and
ANGOA, FIDlab
Marseille
With the
participation of Cine

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

A documentary recording life along the Grande Raccordo Anulare motorway, which encircles Rome. Beginning at night, the film features a cast of everyday individuals, who are introduced, set aside and then revisited in a kind of circular pattern. We meet a paramedic whose work revolves around the activities and emergencies of the GRA; an eel fisherman concerned about the globalisation of the fishing trade; a pair of middle-aged women who live in a camper van just off the highway; an enterprising gentleman who rents his family mansion out to various film and television productions; a father and daughter who spend much of their time in their cramped apartment discussing mundane topics; and an environmental researcher who, in between philosophical musings on the intersection of nature and humanity, records the sounds of weevil larvae invading the country's palm tree population. The GRA, meanwhile, exists quietly in the background of these people's lives.

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

This very loose adaptation of Judith Viorst's 1972 children's book finds its strength in the way that it has been updated for 2014. It gets the cultural references right – one of the indignities Alexander suffers is when an app flawlessly puts a photo of his face on bikini models' bodies and the pictures are texted to the entire school. But it also encapsulates the energy and reality of contemporary family life very truthfully: everyone has to be somewhere, *right now*, or five minutes ago.

In this circus-like atmosphere of extracurricular activities and smartphones, Alexander's birthday wish to spread his habitual bad luck quickly spirals into a *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* territory. (This is largely bolstered by Steve Carell and Jennifer Garner's chemistry and performances as Alexander's parents.) However, the biggest departure from the book is that Alexander routinely stops to consider how other people feel, and although the film's 'lesson' is articulated in voiceover (despite being apparent without it), it proves to be much more profound and less self-centred than the original. **S**



Family life: Steve Carell

Credits and Synopsis

Directed by
Miguel Arteta
Produced by
Shawn Levy
Dan Levine
Lisa Henson
Screenplay/Screen Story
Rob Lieber
Based on the book
by Judith Viorst
Director of Photography
Terry Stacey
Film Editor
Pamela Martin
Production Designer
Michael Corenblith
MUSIC
Christophe Beck
Sound Mixer
Steve Nelson
Costume Designer
Nancy Steiner

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Production Companies
A21 Laps/Jim Henson Company
Executive Producers
Philip Steuer
Jason Lust

Cast
Steve Carell
Ben Cooper
Jennifer Garner
Kelly Cooper
Ed Oxenbould
Alexander Cooper
Dylan Minnette
Anthony Cooper
Kerrie Dorsey
Emily Cooper
Jennifer Coolidge

Ms Suggs
Megan Mullally
Nina
Bella Thorne
Celia
Mary Mouser
Audrey Gibson
Sidney Fullmer
Becky Gibson
Burn Gorman
Mr Brand

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

USA 2014
Certificate PG
80m 59s

US, present-day. Alexander is repeatedly humiliated at school, and finds out that a more popular boy is having a birthday party on the same day as his. At 12.01am on his birthday, Alexander wishes for his family to have a really bad day so that they can understand how he feels all the time. There is a serious misprint in his mother's new book, which jeopardises her promotion; his brother fails his driving test and is suspended from school before the prom; his unemployed father has a humiliating job interview; his thespian sister gets a cold; and his baby brother eats a marker pen. The family pulls together. Alexander's father gets the job, his mother keeps hers, and everyone enjoys Alexander's Australian-themed birthday party.

Annabelle

USA 2014
Director: John R. Leonetti
Certificate 15 98m 38s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Of all the malevolent marionettes and mannequins in movie history, the titular doll of *Annabelle* is probably the laziest in terms of actually getting up and killing people. Where her forebears, from the Zuni fetish troll in *Trilogy of Terror* (1975) to Chucky in *Child's Play* (1988), took some exercise once in a while – scuttling under couches and popping out of closets to attack their human owners – Annabelle, who was last seen resting safely behind glass at the end of *The Conjuring*, subscribes to the less-is-more philosophy of haunting. She's inert, but it's strategic. Like all the best star performers, she's always ready for her close-up.

Annabelle was but a humble bit player in *The Conjuring*, a moderately effective based-on-a-true-ghost-story thriller that became one of 2013's biggest box-office hits. As we're living in the era of the unnecessary prequel, some enterprising soul decided that it was time to fill in the blanks. (Spoiler alert: it was James Wan, the patron saint of creepy puppets.) The result is something pretty much unprecedented: an origin tale about a literal dummy. Insert joke about the woodenness of contemporary horror cinema here.

Set in a thriftily depicted 1969, *Annabelle* exploits its period setting more actively than *The Conjuring*. The opening scene, in which a suburban married couple (Annabelle Wallis and Ward Horton) wake up in the middle of the night to discover that their next-door neighbours have been killed by crazed cultists, tastelessly evokes the Manson Family murders. From there it's a short trip to *Rosemary's Baby*: the main characters are named Mia and John, for goodness' sake.

Relocated to sunny Pasadena after Mia gives birth to a baby daughter – and hoping to leave the bad vibes of the suburban satanist incursion far behind – the couple move into an apartment building so dilapidated and ominous that one almost expects Roman Polanski to cameo as the superintendent. Compounding the creepiness is the fact that Annabelle, originally purchased by



Hello dolly: Annabelle Wallis

John as a gift for his doll-collector wife and then junked when they moved house, seems to have made the trip as well. Perched on the shelf just above the baby's bed, she's a sinisterly grinning symbol of an evil that won't be so easily outrun.

But Annabelle is not just a symbol: she's a literal conduit for demonic forces. Growing increasingly cheesier and more convoluted as it goes on, *Annabelle* suffers from a lack of galvanising actors in its cast. Director John F. Leonetti stages one decent set piece in a darkened storage locker that relies on lighting and camera placement rather than jump scares, and the film is handsome-looking overall. It's also erratically paced, with a very unpersuasive late twist that makes Satan (or whichever dark-arts heavyweight is behind the whole thing) seem like a very bad planner indeed. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Peter Safran
James Wan
Sound Mixer
Matthew Nicolay
Written by
Gary Dauberman
Director of Photography
James Kniest
Edited by
Tom Elkins
Production Designer
Bob Ziembicki
MUSIC

Joseph Bishara
Production
Sound Mixer
Matthew Nicolay
Costume Designer
Janet Ingram

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Entertainment Inc.
and RatPac-Dune
Entertainment LLC
Production Companies

A New Line Cinema presentation in association with RatPac-Dune Entertainment
An Atomic Monster/Safran Company production
Executive Producers
Richard Brener
Walter Hamada
Dave Neustadter
Hans Ritter

Steven Mnuchin

Cast
Annabelle Wallis
Mia Form
Ward Horton
John Form
Tony Amendola
Father Perez
Alfre Woodard
Evelyn
Kerry O'Malley

Sharon Higgins
Brian Howe
Pete Higgins
Eric Ladin
Detective Clarkin
Ivar Brogger
Doctor Burgher

[uncredited]
Tree O'Toole
Annabelle
Higgins, cultist

Dolby Digital/Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

The US, 1969. Pregnant Mia and her husband John wake in the night to discover that their next-door neighbours have been murdered by a pair of cult members. The murderers are killed when the police arrive. Before dying, however, the female cultist (whose name is Annabelle) bleeds into the eye socket of Mia's prized wooden doll – imbuing the toy with the woman's spirit.

Strange things begin happening in John and Mia's home, seemingly orchestrated by the doll. Mia is nearly killed in a fire, but survives to give birth to a daughter, Lea. The couple decide to move to Pasadena, and John throws away the burned doll – but when they arrive at their new apartment they find that it has somehow been packed in with their belongings.

Mia becomes increasingly convinced that the doll is dangerous, and experiences visions of Annabelle stealing Lea. Mia befriends an older bookstore owner named Evelyn, who helps her with her research into demonology. The couple call a priest to take the doll away, but he's brutally attacked by the ghost of Annabelle; later, while John is at the hospital, a demon steals Lea from her crib and instructs Mia that she can trade her soul for her child's. Mia goes to jump out of the window (cradling the possessed doll in her arms) but Evelyn stops her and volunteers her soul instead, as a way of absolving herself for own daughter's accidental death. Mia and John go on with their lives; the Annabelle doll remains at large.

Bang Bang!

Director: Siddharth Anand
Certificate 12A 153m 12s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

It is pointless to expect coherence from Hollywood action tentpoles, and similarly it would be churlish to deny Bollywood audiences their fix in the name of logic. *Bang Bang!*, the official remake of the 2010 Tom Cruise/Cameron Diaz starrer *Knight and Day*, and one of the highest budgeted Indian films of all time, cheerfully dispenses with any sense of rationality and instead genuflects at the sculpted body of Hrithik Roshan as he performs Hollywood-style stunts in a variety of global locations, pausing only to show off his moves with Katrina Kaif as they periodically break into song and dance.

There is a semblance of a plot in which the theft of a diamond is meant to flush out the whereabouts of a dreaded criminal, but that is clearly secondary. This is the kind of film where a handful of thugs can storm MI6's headquarters and get away without breaking sweat; and where a bank receptionist with no previous training can rescue her beau from an Indian secret service stronghold. It is also a showcase for blatant product placement throughout, with Roshan at one point obligingly repeating the tagline of a soft drink he's just swigged. ☹



Hrithik Roshan,
Katrina Kaif

Credits and Synopsis

Written by
Sujoy Ghosh
Suresh Nair
Abbas Tyrewala
Based on the film
Knight and Day
(2010) written by
Patrick O'Neill
**Directors of
Photography**
Vikas Sivaraman
Sunil Patel
Editor
Akiv Ali
**Production
Designer**
Dipankar Dasgupta
Songs
Vishal-Shekhar
Background Score
Salim Sulaiman
Choreographers
Bosco Martis
Caesar Gonsalves

Ahmed Khan
Stunt Co-ordinator
Conrad Palmisano
**Production
Company**
Fox Star Studios
Executive Producer
Sheel Nimbalkar

Cast
Hrithik Roshan
Rajveer Nanda, 'Jai'
Katrina Kaif
Harleen Sahni
Danny Denzongpa
Omar Zafar
Jimmy Shergill
Viren Nanda
Pawan Malhotra
Zorawar
Jaaved Jaffrey
Hamid Gul

Parth Akerkar
Robert
Kishan Gohel
Parker
Sreerag Nambiar
Naveen

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

London, the present. As MI6 hands over international criminal Omar Zafar to the Indian army's Colonel Nanda for extradition, Zafar's men free him and he kills Nanda. Zafar puts out a call for the Koh-i-Noor to be stolen. Rajveer sends word that he's stolen the diamond. After a shootout with Zafar's men in India, Rajveer uses bank receptionist Harleen as cover to escape. Rajveer and Harleen leave a trail of destruction across the world until they track down Zafar. It is revealed that the diamond wasn't stolen after all – the supposed theft was just a ruse to flush out Zafar so that Rajveer could take revenge on him, as Nanda was his brother.

Björk: Biophilia Live

United Kingdom 2014
Directors: Nick Fenton, Peter Strickland
Certificate U 96m 35s

Reviewed by Sam Davies

A caricature of Björk already exists in which she bounces, pixie-like, through the world, cooing "Hello trees! Hello sky!" with wide-eyed wonder. On a superficial level, *Biophilia Live* doesn't do much to change that, capturing as it does the concert version of her 2011 concept album, devoted – as the name suggests – to hymning the wonder and beauty of the natural world and cosmos.

Biophilia, and its live interpretation captured here, is a much more subtle, complex and delightfully weird work than that caricature suggests. Shot at London's Alexandra Palace in 2013, *Biophilia Live* features Björk supported by a 24-member female choir from her native Iceland and a small group of musicians playing bizarre instruments (some of which were invented to record the original album). As a performance it's fairly straight: the musicians play in the round, and some of the odder instruments – the huge Tesla coil, for example – make for startling stage furniture, but there's no elaborate pyrotechnics or constant costume changes by its star.

What transforms *Biophilia Live* are the post-production visuals. Björk has a long history of working in multimedia, and *Biophilia's* initial release was no exception, with every track also 'released' individually as an app that picked up on whichever scientific element had inspired it – whether crystal formation or the double helix. Her videos have never been afterthoughts, knocked out under pressure from the marketing department. Her work with Chris Cunningham on 'All Is Full of Love', an uncanny cyborg love-vignette, became a benchmark in video production, and she's also collaborated with Michel Gondry and Spike Jonze.

Continuing in this vein, bringing in Peter Strickland to co-direct *Biophilia Live* with Nick Fenton is a quietly inspired choice. Strickland's films aren't obvious calling cards for an artist with Björk's futurist, maximalist aesthetic – *Katalin Varga's* take on Transylvania's muddy back-roads and damp fields was distinctly naturalistic, and the claustrophobic confines and playful retro of *Berberian Sound Studio* aren't an immediately obvious fit either. But then you remember the



Natural born singer: Björk

latter's lingering close-ups on smashed and rotten vegetables, and its blood-red lighting, as though Toby Jones was trapped inside an aortic valve. (You recall too Strickland's work with experimental musicians such as the Bohman Brothers.) *Biophilia* dwells unblinkingly on the visceral and decaying, refusing a sanitised version of nature for a warts-and-all vision – one of its tracks is a love song devoted to a virus.

With co-director Fenton, Strickland embarks on a process they describe as "colouring in" Björk's performance. This proves to be an apt phrase: the screen becomes not a surface but a series of layers, as animations and archive footage from nature documentaries swarm over, glow through and grow around Björk's performance. Mushrooms swell, bloom and subside in bulbous miniature forests. Starfish conduct elaborate mass courtships. Tiny creatures strip a larger one's bones in a time-lapse sequence that telescopes death and disintegration into a matter of a few fleeting frames. During 'Hidden Place', a vertiginous depth is created by billowing clouds that briefly seem to be a ceiling projection inside the venue, until the eye realises this can't be so.

With its introductory voiceover by David Attenborough and obvious love for the simple sublimity that the best big-budget nature series achieve, *Biophilia Live* appears to borrow the trappings of documentary. But instead Björk, Fenton and Strickland have produced a near-epic work of nature psychedelia, a strange hybrid piece with a strange hybrid lineage that takes in Disney's *Fantasia* and Stevie Wonder's *Journey Through "The Secret Life of Plants"* as much as *The Blue Planet*. But *Biophilia Live* also resists a number of easy moves. There's no didactic environmentalism – no burning oil platforms or seagulls marinated in Brent crude. It relies instead on convincing the audience of the preciousness of what it depicts. It also avoids crude oppositions of nature and humanity. For Björk, technophilia is clearly a kind of subset within her own personal biophilia. This is audible at the level of the instrumentation, with its buzz-saw synths, pendulums, Tesla coils and invented instruments, but also visible in the ingenious flow of animations and overlays. To adapt a very old quotation, *Biophilia Live* asserts that nothing human is foreign to nature. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jacqui Edenbrow
**Director of
Photography**
Brett Turnbull
Editor
Nick Fenton
Musical Directors
Björk
Matt Robertson
**All Music
Produced by**
Björk
Sound Design/Mix
Björk
Addi 800

@Wellhart Ltd/One
Little Indian Ltd
**Production
Companies**
A Gloria production
in association with
One Little Indian and
Wellcome Trust
**Executive
Producers**
Derek Birkett
Emma Birkett
Meroë Candy
opening sequence
voice

**David
Attenborough**

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributors
Gloria Films,
One Little Indian,
Wellcome Trust

A concert film documenting Icelandic artist Björk performing her seventh album, 'Biophilia', at London's Alexandra Palace in 2013. Björk is accompanied by a 24-member choir and a small group of musicians playing instruments invented for the album's recording. The performance is augmented visually by nature imagery and animation.

Black Butler

Japan 2014
Directors: Otani Kentaro, Sato Keiichi
Certificate 15 119m 17s

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

Black Butler has a heavy burden to bear: it is the live-action version of a wildly popular manga series by Toboso Yana which has sold 18 million copies worldwide and has been made into a musical and three separate anime series. The *ne plus ultra* of cosplay enthusiasts, it circumscribes that strange zone where Japan has co-opted Victorian/Edwardian English literature for a new cultural synthesis, a cherry-picked aesthetic via a Neverland of perceived gentility, a kind of teen drag, a *kawaii* dolls-house *Downton Abbey* with electronics and teacups and Shinto spirits.

The film has – you will not be surprised to hear – a bevy of fashion models and teen idols on board, and no fewer than two directors: Sato Keiichi, an award-winning animation director, seems to be tasked with maintaining the manga integrity of the production, while Otani Kentaro directs the actors.

The original manga comic has the young aristocratic boy Ciel Phantomhive living in Victorian England with a demon butler at his beck and call; it's a classic Faustian pact, the soul-eater waiting patiently for his employer's death. In the comic, both boy and demon are also responsible for investigating a whole bunch of criminal scenarios on behalf of Queen Victoria. It's sad, then, to see this aspect of the original completely stripped away, for the fabulous and unassailable reason that, according to producer Matsushashi Shinzō, "If the film were set in [the] 19th century in [the] UK, it would be impossible for Japanese actors to play the characters." This is not in any sense a version of the bestselling manga, because that, apparently, is just too difficult.

But let's look at the positives. *Black Butler* is a lot of fun. Goriki Ayame plays the girl-pretending-to-be-a-boy central character Kiyoharu/Shiori with a kind of numb intensity, peering at the baleful world through a curtain of hair, much as her tousled alter ego the Black Butler does. When she's not sullenly looking into the mystery of her parents' assassination and maintaining the comic fiction of being a boy, she seems to be indentured to a crime-fighting organisation and is sent to solve the mystery of a series of killings that involve the victims being spookily transformed into mummies. In the background,



Mind your manors: Ayame Goriki

an aunt hovers – we shall know more about her by the end. Meanwhile the Black Butler – Kiyoharu names him Sebastian after a beloved dog – is a supernatural entity of remarkable elegance, dispatching vulgar criminal elements with a few flashes of a silver dining knife.

The costumes are stylised – fashion house GalaabenD made Sebastian's rather swish coat with extra-long tails to emphasise his martial-arts moves – and the film's art design is pin-bright and surreal, with the especially memorable scenes in Kiyoharu's family home (a kind of theme-park Versailles) shot in the Arita Porcelain Park in Saga Prefecture. This is – in the end – a porcelain world. The booms of the fight scenes and the neon-fissured establishing shots of night-time in an Asian city never seem to trouble the fragility of a place where the rich have both money and supernatural power to tend to their comfort, and yet are presented as appealing gender-ambiguous victims. It's *Batman* of course – but *Batman* in which grumpy teen girls have a compliant non-threatening boyfriend who is threatening to everyone else. What's not to like? 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Matsushashi Shinzō

Screenplay
Kuroiwa Tsutomu
Based on the manga

Kuroshitsuji by
Toboso Yana

Director of
Photography

Ajisaka Terukuni

Editor
Imai Tsuyoshi

Production Designer
Koizumi Hiroyasu

Music

Matzura Akihisa

Costume Designers

Tokunaga Takashi

Shimizu Sumiko

Action Director

Ouchi Takahito

©Yana Toboso/

Square Enix,

"Kuroshitsuji"

Film Partners

Production

Companies

Warner Bros. Pictures

Japan presents in

association with

"Kuroshitsuji"

Film Partners

A C&I Entertainment

and Rockworks

production

Cast

Mizushima Hiro

Sebastian Michaelis,

"Black Butler"

Goriki Ayame

Genpo Shiori, 'Count

Genpo Kiyoharu'

Yuka

Wakatsuki Hanae

Yamamoto Mizuki

Rin

Ibu Masahato

Kuzo Shinpei

Kishitani Goro

Nekoma Saneatsu

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Warner Bros

Distributors (UK)

Japanese

theatrical title

Kuroshitsuji

An alternate-reality Asian city, the near future. In the luxurious Genpo mansion, a young butler tends to the needs of 'Kiyoharu', the 17-year-old president of the Funtom toy company. Kiyoharu has a secret known only to the butler – he is in fact a girl. The only survivor of an assassination attempt on her family, she is masquerading as a boy while quietly planning to avenge her parents' death. The butler is a demon and, in exchange for serving the Genpo family, consumes their souls at the end of their lives. Kiyoharu and the butler are also crime-fighting vigilantes; they foil a people-trafficking group and investigate a series of assassinations in which people are killed by instant mummification. It transpires that the assassin is Kiyoharu's aunt Hanae: the deadly pharmaceuticals she has developed to extend her own life cause the mummification. In a dramatic showdown, Kiyoharu and the Black Butler defuse a necrosis bomb with help from a housemaid.

The Book of Life

USA 2014
Director: Jorge R. Gutiérrez
Certificate U 95m 20s

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

What if death were just another phase in our lives, and our deceased loved ones were closer than we thought? Drawing on Mexican folklore and other Latin American traditions, Jorge R. Gutiérrez's version of death in his beautiful, witty 3D-animated debut *The Book of Life* is bursting with vibrant colours and magic – a constantly expanding, never-ending party. Thus, as per Mexican tradition, La Muerte is no pale, black-clad man brandishing a scythe but a dazzling, intelligent female who cares for everyone equally as she reigns over the Land of the Remembered. Her wicked (and wickedly charming) estranged husband Xibalba rules over the Land of the Forgotten, and both these worlds come together once a year during the famous celebrations of Día de los Muertos, when Muerte is the queen of life for a day.

It is on this very day that a group of 'difficult' kids is taken on a museum tour by a beguiling, mysterious guide who introduces them to the Book of Life that gives the film its title. Everyone's lives are documented in its pages. One of its stories concerns a love triangle between three amigos: Manolo, a bullfighter by family tradition but a musician at heart; María, the courageous and smart daughter of San Ángel's town mayor; and Joaquín, a valiant soldier-to-be with a good heart yet undeniably self-centred. They will all have to find their true selves before they can find each other. With such a setting, it's perhaps not surprising that the first name in the opening credits is that of co-producer Guillermo del Toro, the Mexican filmmaker whose involvement in this project has been characterised by Gutiérrez as that of "a very loving but strict professor".

It's an inventive, funny and genuinely touching tale about growing up, finding happiness in the happiness of others and, above all, the importance of family and carving your place as an individual within it. The theme of taking charge of your own destiny is given a distinct feminist slant. Gutiérrez co-designed the characters with his



Mex appeal: *The Book of Life*

The Case Against 8

Directors: Ben Cotner, Ryan White

wife Sandra, and it shows; women here match (or surpass) men in all spheres, be it wit, courage or intellect. And although it's essentially a love triangle with a woman at its centre, María is far from being the princessy type.

Characters are not just well-rounded on the page but almost tangibly three-dimensional; María and her suitors were made manually out of wood, the baddies out of metal, and the evident craft and attention to detail pays off, giving the different worlds defining textures. The same can be said of the soundtrack, composed by Oscar-winning Argentine composer Gustavo Santaolalla (*Brokeback Mountain*, *Babel*), who more than once nods to adult viewers with unexpected 'Latinised' versions of songs such as Radiohead's *Creep*.

Del Toro's dictum has always been that stories are what moves the world. Gutiérrez takes this idea and gives it a Russian doll spin - a story within a tale, within another story kept in a book where all the stories are written, be they true or made-up. The thrilling narrative whisks the characters (and viewers of all ages) from the sundrenched land of the living to the centre of darkness through the magical world of Death and back. Quite a ride. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Guillermo del Toro Aaron D. Berger Carina Schulze	Production Companies Twentieth Century Fox and Reel FX Animation Studios present a Guillermo del Toro production	María Channing Tatum Joaquín
Screenplay Jorge R. Gutiérrez Doug Landale	Executive Producers Aron Warner Cary Granat Chuck Peil	Dolby Digital/ Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1]
Editor Ahren Shaw	Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)	
Production Designer Simón Vladimir Varela		
Music Gustavo Santaolalla	Voice Cast Christina Applegate Mary Beth Ice Cube Candle Maker Kate del Castillo La Muerte Diego Luna Manolo Ron Perlman Xibalba Zoë Saldana	
Sound Supervision/ Design Scott Martin Gershlin Head of Animation Wesley Mandell		
©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and Reel FX Productions II, LLC		

The US. Four 'difficult' young kids are taken on a museum tour by a mysterious guide, Mary Beth. Accessing the building by a hidden door, they end up in the Mexican area, where Mary Beth, who has a helper, shows them the Book of Life, in which all stories are written, real and fictional. The guide focuses on the story of childhood friends Manolo, María and Joaquín, whose love triangle is the focus of a bet between two deities, La Muerte (Death, who rules over the Land of the Remembered) and her estranged husband Xibalba (the Lord of the Land of the Forgotten). If María chooses valiant, selfish Joaquín over sensible, generous Manolo, the two deities will swap worlds. María's father, the town mayor, sends her to a convent in Spain to become a 'proper' lady; Joaquín enlists in the army; and Manolo, a musician at heart, is trained by his father in the family tradition of bullfighting. Years pass until the three are reunited on the day of Manolo's first bullfight. He refuses to kill the bull. After a series of tests, María marries Manolo. Joaquín, after helping to save their town from evil, becomes a hero by learning to be selfless. When the kids leave the museum, Mary Beth and her helper reveal themselves to be La Muerte and Xibalba.

Reviewed by Ben Walters

Will-they-won't-they is a pretty standard set-up for movies about couples on the path to tying the knot - but the obstacle is rarely one of legal and administrative procedure. The documentary *The Case Against 8* traces the progress of the ultimately successful legal campaign against Proposition 8, the 2008 California state constitutional amendment that blocked same-sex marriage. It's a view from the inside, drawing on testimony from, and footage of, the activists, attorneys and plaintiffs at the heart of the five-year campaign, and this closeness is both its strength and its weakness: the film offers an interesting and moving sense of the case as a personal mission for those involved but makes minimal effort to communicate opposing viewpoints or contextualise the fight within the broader framework of the pursuit of LGBT rights.

It's a story of three couples. Two of them - Paul Katami and Jeffrey Zarrillo, Kristin Perry and Sandra Stier - were the named plaintiffs in the case. They come across as thoroughly likeable, warmly affectionate, heartfelt and sympathetic in their refutation of bigotry, but not bitter or self-involved - testament both to their own characters and to the extensive vetting process, glanced at here, calculated to select unimpeachably nice plaintiffs. Making up the third couple - a professional rather than romantic partnership - are lawyers Ted Olson and David Boies, who represented George W. Bush and Al Gore respectively in the Supreme Court case that ultimately decided the 2000 election. The anti-Prop 8 campaign's great coup was to provide a common cause behind which these two erstwhile foes could unite - though rather than wary collaborators they appear bosom buddies, each as nice as the other.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Ben Cotner Ryan White	Sound Editor Henry Auerbach	for HBO: Sheila Nevins
Camera Rebekah Fergusson Ryan White	Production Companies HBO Documentary Films presents a Tripod Media production and a Moore's Filmed Goods and Services film	In Colour [1.78:1]
Edited by Kate Amend	Executive Producer	Distributor Dogwoof
Music Blake Neely		
Supervising		

A documentary about the legal challenge mounted against Proposition 8, a 2008 California state ban on same-sex marriage. The film follows plaintiffs Paul Katami, Jeffrey Zarrillo, Kristin Perry and Sandra Stier, attorneys Ted Olson and David Boies, and staff of the American Foundation for Equal Rights, which co-ordinated the legal challenge.

The team prepares for a 2010 federal district court hearing, which declares the Proposition unconstitutional, though same-sex marriages remain illegal pending appeal. There are interviews with those involved and we witness some family occasions. Following further rulings and appeals, in 2013 the case is taken up by the Supreme Court, which rejects the Proposition's supporters' right to bring a case on the basis that they weren't harmed by same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage having been affirmed as legal in California, the plaintiffs marry in front of media and supporters.



Wedding planners: *The Case Against 8*

In fact, *The Case Against 8* is nice to a fault, not only in the amiability of its subjects but in the lack of complexity or conflict with which it presents one of the most contentious issues in contemporary America and beyond. Directors Ben Cotner, an executive at Paramount Pictures and Open Road Films, and Ryan White, who's made documentaries about the Beatles' secretary and pick-up soccer, have said that they were keen to document a chapter in their nation's history. They have indeed recorded much of interest, especially in terms of the emotional impact on the plaintiffs of cross-examination rehearsals and the like, and have netted themselves a Sundance award in the process.

Yet the film feels almost like a campaign video in its rousing simplicity. Prop 8 was passed at the ballot box but there's hardly any attempt to explore the thinking or feelings of those opposed to gay marriage, and not a hint that some LGBT campaigners have reservations about the issue's pre-eminence over other injustices. Even within its own parameters, the documentary arguably overstates the case's ultimate importance, though there's no doubting its significance as part of a shifting legal landscape. The film frustrates in genre terms too. As courtroom drama, it suffers from the lack of tension about the outcome, the absence of video footage from court hearings and haziness about exactly what's at stake at each stage of proceedings. It doesn't really satisfy as romance either because, as powerful as some of the plaintiffs' words are, we remain only superficially engaged with their lives.

All this said, *The Case Against 8*, like the case itself, delivers where it counts, communicating the pervasive, traumatic and sometimes exhausting experience of being singled out for exclusion and belittlement on the basis of one's sexuality. For this reason, the emotional impact of witnessing our heroes' quests end in marriage is considerable. **S**

Citizenfour

USA/South Africa/United Kingdom/Germany 2014
Director: Laura Poitras

Reviewed by Nick Bradshaw

For those who do not recognise Edward Snowden's revelations of enhanced domestic spying capabilities as intrinsically terrifying, the assurance largely goes that if you've nothing to hide then you've nothing to fear from machines built to record all possible data about you. Snowden also has his critics who argue that his flight from both line-managers and prosecutors undermines his moral case and forfeits what President Obama, excerpted here, po-facedly dreams could have been an "orderly... thoughtful, fact-based debate" that would have "led us to a better place". Convicted WikiLeaks Chelsea Manning is not mentioned, but these notions are otherwise countered in Laura Poitras's film by the experiences of NSA veteran-turned-dissident William Binney (the subject of her previous short *The Program*), never questioned by Congress but escorted from his shower one morning by government agents at gunpoint, and by AT&T customers' class-action suit against warrantless governmental wiretapping, stalled in court for a decade.

Snowden and others verbalise many of the actual and hypothetical arguments for privacy – the chilling, self-policing effects of "the expectation that we're being watched" on online intellectual exploration; the improbability of "meaningfully opposing" changes to surveillance policy once the systems have been built. Brits recently regaled with revelations of undercover officers spying on murder victims' families and infiltrating the beds of environmental campaigners may also be inspired to imagine the worst. But far from just trading in conjecture and abstraction, *Citizenfour* self-reflexively dramatises the dangers that Snowden wants to warn us about. Built around the eight days in June 2013 he spent with the filmmaker and *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald in a Hong Kong hotel room divulging his secrets, the film plays like a reality cat-and-mouse spy thriller, with the trio out to expose the dragnet before it catches them. Electrifyingly, the film shows us history in the making. Has such a political actor ever before gone direct to a filmmaker in the heat of the action?

To be sure, there are questions of nuance and balance you'll not find in this film, with its self-selecting cast of liberty advocates. Poitras had already wised up about US government watchlists the hard way, after 40-plus airport interrogations in the years following her work filming Iraq's 2005 elections and their boycott in *My Country, My Country*. She was already exploring a film about US surveillance (to complete a trilogy about American policy after 9/11, following 2010's *The Oath*, about Yemeni ex-jihadis and Guantanamo Bay), and came to Snowden's attention through her film about Binney. Her journalistic ally Greenwald had written about her travails before Snowden recommended that she bring him with her to their Hong Kong rendezvous, and he constitutes one of the most strident, and eloquent, voices in the film; he leaps on the information trove and immediately, brilliantly, sets to battle.

This Hong Kong hotel chamber drama is, unsurprisingly, the heart of the film. Poitras tops and tails with other voices (Binney and



Secrets and lies: Edward Snowden

hacker Jacob Appelbaum, as well as security chiefs James R. Clapper and Keith Alexander) and locations, from the supsize data centre the NSA is building at Bluffdale, Utah, to the *Guardian*'s basement and the parliaments of Brazil and Germany. But Snowden, in sundry monochrome T-shirts and later a hotel robe, is the earnest, fresh-faced, unlikely calm at the centre of his storm. Unlike in Poitras's earlier studies of decision-making in the moment, Snowden has already set out his stall: we watch him watch the consequences. He's remarkably lucid setting forth his motivations and defending his methods: he's entrusting professional journalists to decide what's in the public interest and wants to "remove his bias from the equation"; you could torture him and he wouldn't be able to divulge encrypted passwords; if he were doing this for profit there'd be far easier ways; he doesn't want to become the story but "anything to get this out"; and he wants the target painted "directly to my back" to take the heat off his family. He must have endlessly rehearsed all this to himself.

A wry paranoia often prevails – in Snowden's attempts to teach Greenwald basic computer-security sense; in the cloak, termed by Greenwald his "mantle of power", under which Snowden hides to input computer passwords; and in the black-comical barrage of phone calls and fire alarms that later interrupt their discussions.

Snowden is at his most shaken after an update from his forsaken girlfriend, and perhaps when the prospect of an escape route finally presents itself. But the basic optimism of his actions is reflected in one characteristic exchange, when he responds to Greenwald's rallying cry about not being bullied into silence by expressing hope that the "internet principle of the Hydra" will apply, and that "seven more will step up when I'm gone."

As it happens, Poitras is able to end on something of that note, finding Snowden now in his Russian sanctum, rejoined by his girlfriend. The news from Greenwald is that a more senior whistleblower has emerged from another part of the US government. Details are scanty, partly because this brings the film into the present moment, and partly because Greenwald and Snowden communicate here in handwritten notes which they then shred, though the information in question seems to relate to recent revelations about the government's terrorism watchlist and a direct command line to the US president. Just as Alex Gibney's *We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks* (2013) cautioned against blind faith in leaders, so *Citizenfour* is shadowed by an erstwhile reformer who rode social and digital optimism to the White House. Poitras ends on a shot of the shreds of paper. The revolution will not be emailed, or recorded, or spoken. But it could still make thrilling cinema. 🍿

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Dirk Wilitzky
Producers
Laura Poitras
Mathilde Bonnefoy
Edited by
Laura Poitras
Kirsten Johnson
Katy Scoggin
Trevor Paglen
Edited by
Mathilde Bonnefoy

Sound Recordists
Laura Poitras
Judy Karp
@Praxis Films
Production Companies
BRITDOC and
Artificial Eye
present a Praxis
Films production
in association with

Participant Media,
HBO Documentary
Films in co-production
with Bertha
Foundation/BRITDOC
Circle, Channel 4,
Norddeutscher
Rundfunk NDR,
Bayerischer
Rundfunk BR
With support
from Deutscher

Filmförderfonds
Made possible
by support from
Vital Projects
Fund, Cinereach,
Sundance Institute
Documentary
Film Program,
Ford Foundation -
JustFilms, Deutscher
Filmförderfonds DFFF
Additional Funding:

MacArthur Fellowship,
USA Rockefeller
Fellowship,
Anonymous
Was a Woman
Executive Producers
Steven Soderbergh
Jeff Skoll
Diane Weyermann
David Menschel
Tom Quinn
Sheila Nevins

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

A documentary about the augmentation of US state surveillance powers in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The film focuses on the 2013 rendezvous in a Hong Kong hotel room between the filmmaker Laura Poitras and NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden (journalists Glenn Greenwald and Ewen MacAskill are also present), detailing

the impact of Snowden's revelations of electronic spying capabilities. Bookending the encounter are discussions of further whistleblowing experiences, including that of ex-NSA 'crypto-mathematician' William Binney and a new source who has made contact with Poitras's colleague Jeremy Scahill since Snowden came forward.

Dracula Untold

USA/Japan 2014
Director: Gary Shore
Certificate 15 92m 11s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Bram Stoker most likely titled his novel *Dracula* because he liked the sound of the name – in his original outline, the villain was called Count Wampyr. Stoker gives the count a speech that suggests the undead vampire was in life a Romanian prince who fought against the Ottoman Empire. In 1972 the academics Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNally published *In Search of Dracula*, which influentially identified the Dracula character with the historical Vlad III, though Stoker probably knew or cared as much about Vlad as Dumas or Rostand did about the historical d'Artagnan or Cyrano de Bergerac; it is now almost obligatory for *Dracula* adaptations to play up the Vlad connection. The first writer to give Dracula a Vlad-related origin story seems to have been radio playwright Brian Hayles, whose 1974 drama *Lord Dracula* was developed by Hammer Films as an unproduced project, *Vlad the Impaler*, for much of the 1970s. Subsequent novels (Peter Tremayne's *Dracula Unborn*, Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*) and films (Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, the TV movie *Dark Prince: The True Story of Dracula*) have gone over similar ground so often that this 'untold' version should more truthfully be labelled the same old story.

Like everything from the *Star Wars* prequels to *Maleficent*, Gary Shore's *Dracula Untold* follows the pattern of giving a famous villain a comic-book-style origin story in which a thorny character arc goes from naive decency to total monster. Luke Evans's brooding, chiselled, ripped Transylvanian prince is a loving family man who only impales an entire village "to save ten more" and puts away his Gary Oldman-style dragon armour hoping never to have to use it again... until his family is threatened. Vlad strikes a bargain with Charles Dance's *Nosferatu*-look Old Man of the Mountains (who seems to be patient zero of vampirism) and is given superpowers (mainly turning into a swarm of CGI bats but also Wolverine-like rapid healing). Like Superman, he needs a weakness to allow for a suspenseful finale, so silver is his kryptonite: his enemy, the



A likely Vlad: Luke Evans

wicked Sultan Mehmed (Dominic Cooper), fights him on a carpet of coins and tries to drown him in money. The superhero connection is furthered as Vlad's bland, saintly wife takes a long, slow, Gwen Stacy-like death plunge to motivate the next stage in his transformation.

With its studded leather outfits, Northern Irish locations and relentlessly thudding dialogue, this isn't much of a medieval epic – but it's not much of a horror movie either, with weightless CGI monsters that could have come from an *Underworld* prequel and a peculiar nervousness about its own premise. Having set out to show how stern-but-fair Vlad becomes the monstrous Dracula, the film cops out in a coda that connects with no known version of the story, presenting Evans as an eternal romantic who so far as we know hasn't bitten anyone innocent, while Dance's nameless fiend, stalking in his footsteps, seems more like Stoker's Dracula. A weakness of Coppola's film was that in rethinking Dracula as a great romantic, it reduced his stature as a monster. But in *Dracula Untold* he's not even a tragically flawed good guy. Backstory doesn't necessarily make for stronger characterisation, and the outcome here isn't the untold story of any of the Draculas worthy of the name – Bram Stoker's, Bela Lugosi's, Christopher Lee's, Klaus Kinski's, even Udo Kier's – but the all too familiar story of someone we've never met before and are unlikely to see again. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michael De Luca
Screenplay
Matt Sazama
Burk Sharpless
Director of Photography
John Schwartzman
Edited by
Richard Pearson
Production Designer
François Audouy
Music
Ramin Djawadi
Production Sound Mixer

Mervyn Moore
Costume Designer
Ngila Dickson

©Universal Studios and
Legendary Pictures
Productions, LLC
Production Companies
Universal Pictures and
Legendary Pictures
present a Michael
De Luca production
Presented in
association with

Dentsu Inc./
Fuji Television
Network, Inc.
With the partial
assistance of the
European Regional
Development Fund
through Northern
Ireland Screen
Québec - Production
Services Tax Credit
Executive Producers
Alissa Phillips
Joe Caracciolo Jr
Thomas Tull
Jon Jashni

Cast

Luke Evans
Vlad III, Prince of
Wallachia, Dracula
Sarah Gadon
Mirena
Dominic Cooper
Sultan Mehmed II
Art Parkinson
Ingeras
Charles Dance
Master Vampire
Diarmuid Murtagh
Dimitru
Paul Kaye

Brother Lucian
William Houston
Cazan
Noah Huntley
Captain Petru
Ronan Vibert
Simion
Zach McGowan
Shkelgim
Ferdinand Kingsley
Hamza Bey

Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

Transylvania, 1462. Sultan Mehmed II demands that Prince Vlad turn over a thousand boys – including his own son Ingeras – to be raised as Janissaries, to fight for the Ottoman Empire. Having been a hostage in his childhood, Vlad has promised his wife Mirena that he will not let Ingeras suffer as he did. Realising that he hasn't the military resources to fight the sultan, Vlad ventures to a mountain cave and drinks the blood of a vampire who lives there, gaining all the powers of a vampire for three

days, with the possibility of reverting to human status if he refrains from drinking human blood. As a shapeshifting monster, Vlad defeats Mehmed's first army, then retreats to a monastery with his family and retainers. When Mirena is mortally wounded, Vlad drinks her blood and becomes a full vampire – then defeats and kills Mehmed.

Taking the name Dracula, he lives to the present day and encounters Mina, a woman who looks like Mirena. The vampire of the mountain cave has also survived.

The Drop

USA/United Kingdom/Australia 2014
Director: Michael R. Roskam
Certificate 15 106m 25s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Belgian director Michael R. Roskam made an auspicious debut with 2011's *Bullhead*, a stark drama that juggled macro and micro in combining the narrative density of a complex crime saga with the precision focus of an intimate character study. This stateside follow-up finds him collaborating with author Dennis Lehane, adapting his own short story 'Animal Rescue' for another underworld tale of past transgressions returning to impact on the present. On paper, it seems a shrewd meeting of minds – it's not difficult to imagine Lehane approving of *Bullhead*'s fatalistic, occasionally melodramatic take on the return of the repressed – so it's frustrating that *The Drop* only sporadically comes to life, despite its atmospheric rendering of a distinctly unfashionable corner of Brooklyn (replacing the source material's familiar Boston turf) and the low-rung players who people it.

As with Ben Affleck's adaptation of Lehane's *Gone Baby Gone* (2007), we get the initial lowdown on a tight-knit neighbourhood through brisk montage and voiceover narration, as bartender Bob Saginowski (Tom Hardy) explains the logistics of the borough's Mob-controlled 'drop' bars – unassuming joints where dirty money is laundered. Much as he did with the rural black market of Flanders in *Bullhead*, Roskam establishes this earthy milieu with deft economy. The Brooklyn depicted here appears conspicuously untouched by gentrification, although the parish church is being sold off to developers (for "condos with stained-glass windows"). Denizens such as Marv (James Gandolfini) are, however, acutely aware of their onrushing obsolescence ("We're dead already... just still walking around"). A onetime big deal, Marv is now under the thumb of the local Chechen mob; his reckless hubris worries the loyal, dependable Bob and eventually leads to arranging to have his own bar robbed on drop night – a rash moneymaking scheme that quickly goes awry (a similar plotline featured in Andrew Dominik's recession-clouded *Killing Them Softly*, in which Gandolfini had a memorably dyspeptic cameo). In his final screen appearance, the late actor does strong work as this corroded has-been, railing against his relegation ("At least I used to have something. I was respected. I was *feared*").

Bob, meanwhile, is notionally a placid loner who's possibly mildly autistic – a diagnosis supported by both Lehane's script and Hardy's studied performance. His chance discovery of an abandoned, brutalised pit-bull puppy and the hesitant bonding that ensues with a wary neighbour (an underused Noomi Rapace) give the impression of a sentimental diversion (the awkward meet-cute over a dustbin could belong to another film altogether). But the pooch doubles as both a macguffin that will set disparate characters on collision courses and as a symbol of Bob's own wayward past – and teeth-baring future.

The film's downbeat, subdued tenor suggests that Roskam's aesthetic touchstones might be 1970s-era Sidney Lumet or Bob Rafelson; there's also a hint of Jerry Schatzberg in the way that scenes are allowed to breathe deeply and halting conversations are lingered over. It's

heartening to witness a gangland thriller free of bombast, but too often there's a listless quality to the action, and moments that should be charged feel static and leaden. A few tête-à-têtes between Bob and a volatile local ne'er-do-well (another charismatic appearance from *Bullhead's* Matthias Schoenaerts) bristle with menace, but other scenes are left to simmer too long; in being opened out, the slight story can turn baggy. Overall, it's a minor, albeit flavoursome entry in the Lehane canon. For Roskam, you sense the greater work lies ahead. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Peter Chernin
Jenno Topping
Screenplay
Dennis Lehane
Based upon his short story *Animal Rescue*
Director of Photography
Nicolas Karakatsanis
Edited by
Christopher Tellefsen
Production Designer
Thérèse DePrez
Music
Marco Beltrami
Sound Mixer
Justin Gray
Costume Designer
David Robinson

production
Made in association with TSG
Entertainment and Ingenious Media
Produced in association with Big Screen Productions
With the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development
Executive Producers
Mike Larocca
M. Blair Breard
Dennis Lehane
Film Extracts
Cry of the City (1948)

Michael Esper
Rardy
Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]
Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

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©TCF Hungary Film Rights Exploitation Limited Liability Company, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC (in Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain)
Production Companies
Fox Searchlight Pictures presents a Chernin Entertainment

Cast
Tom Hardy
Bob Saginowski
Noomi Rapace
Nadia
James Gandolfini
Cousin Marv
Matthias Schoenaerts
Eric Deeds
John Ortiz
Detective Torres
Ann Dowd
Dottie
Michael Aronov
Chovka
James Frecheville
Fitz
Elizabeth Rodriguez
Detective Romsey
Tobias Segal
Briele

Brooklyn, present day. Bob Saginowski is bartender at his cousin Marv's bar, which is used by the Chechen mob to launder cash. Bob finds a brutalised, abandoned puppy in a dustbin; a neighbour, Nadia, persuades him to keep it. Unknown to Bob, Marv arranges for the bar to be robbed. However, the men hired leave a trail, and Marv and Bob later find the money returned to the bar accompanied by a dismembered arm. Panicked, Marv finds and kills the surviving thief. Despite this, the Chechens entrust Marv with a lucrative cash drop scheduled for Super Bowl weekend. Bob is harassed by Eric Deeds, an ex-con who claims responsibility for an unsolved neighbourhood murder. Insisting that he owns the dog, Deeds demands that Bob pay him \$10,000 for it. Nadia reveals that she and Deeds once dated. Marv proposes that Deeds rob the bar on Super Bowl night. Deeds forces Nadia along with him. Marv is executed by the Chechens. Ignoring Bob's offer to pay for the dog, Deeds demands the cash in the safe instead. Bob, revealing that he committed the unsolved murder on behalf of Marv, shoots Deeds dead. The Chechens take over Marv's bar but let Bob stay. Bob reconciles with Nadia.

Fury

USA 2014
Director: David Ayer
Certificate 15 134m 27s



The iron giant: Brad Pitt

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The M4 Sherman was the workhorse tank of American forces in World War II, though it had practical design flaws that placed it at a distinct disadvantage to the German Tiger I – not least of these was a frontal armour plate that could be punctured by a well-placed incendiary round, cooking the entire crew alive. If seeing this sort of arms-and-armour marginalia in a practical context interests you – and it does me – well then *Fury* might just be the movie for you.

"Wait until you see it, what a man can do to another man." This is battle-scarred veteran Grady 'Coon-Ass' Travis (Jon Bernthal), talking to tyro Norman Ellison (Logan Lerman). Ellison has been yanked out of the typing pool and subbed into the crew of the tank 'Fury', who've been together since the North African campaign.

That "wait until you see it" is a threat, but it's also a promise from writer/director David Ayer, whose recounting of the beginning of the end of the war on the European front fairly wades through viscera. Shortly after hearing this, Ellison has to pick up a chunk of human face that had belonged to his predecessor, including a coldly staring eye. In the two-plus hours that follow, we'll see field hospitals and meat wagons, limbs clipped off by machine-gun fire, a man on fire who summons the presence of mind to blow his brains out, a corpse flattened by tank treads until barely recognisable as human, and other vignettes too numerous to mention.

Squeamish and untested, Ellison is our point of entry into this world. He – and by association we – will be shown the ropes by Sergeant Don 'Wardaddy' Collier, played by Brad Pitt. Because

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bill Block
David Ayer
Ethan Smith
John Leshner
Written by
David Ayer
Director of Photography
Roman Vasyanov
Film Editors
Dody Dorn
Jay Cassidy
Production Designer
Andrew Menzies
Music
Steven Price
Production Sound Mixer
Lisa Pinero
Costume Designer
Owen Thornton

presents in association with QED International and LStar Capital a QED International, Le Grisbi, Crave Films production
A film by David Ayer
Executive Producers
Brad Pitt
Sasha Shapiro
Anton Lessine
Alex Ott
Ben Waisbren

Cast
Brad Pitt
Don 'Wardaddy' Collier
Shia LaBeouf
Boyd 'Bible' Swan
Logan Lerman
Norman Ellison
Michael Peña
Trini 'Gordo' Garcia
Jon Bernthal
Grady 'Coon-Ass' Travis
Jason Isaacs

Captain Waggoner
Brad William Henke
Sergeant Davis
Jim Parrack
Sergeant Binkowski
Xavier Samuel
Lieutenant Parker
Scott Eastwood
Sergeant Miles
Kevin Vance
Sergeant Peterson
Anamaria Marinca
Irma
Alicia von Rittberg

Emma
Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

Germany, 1945. The crew of Sherman tank 'Fury' – Don 'Wardaddy' Collier, Boyd Swan, 'Gordo' Garcia and Grady Travis – return to camp having lost one of their own in battle. They acquire a new crew member, Norman Ellison, who has no combat experience. During his first mission with Fury, Ellison hesitates to fire in combat, so Collier forces him to kill a prisoner. Ellison performs better on their next mission, clearing a German village, so afterwards Collier takes him for a romantic interlude with two village women. Ellison becomes smitten with the younger, who is killed by incoming

artillery immediately after their tryst. Fury and its crew join a detachment of tanks to hold a crossroads and defend an American encampment. Arriving at the crossroads, Fury is disabled by a landmine. Ellison, scouting ahead, sights an SS division advancing towards them. Collier convinces his crew to stay and hold the crossroads. They do so, inflicting devastating losses on the enemy as they are picked off one by one. Finally, alone, Ellison slithers through an escape hatch and buries himself in the mud. The following day, he is discovered by advancing American forces.

Giovanni's Island

Japan 2014
Director: Nishikubo Mizuho

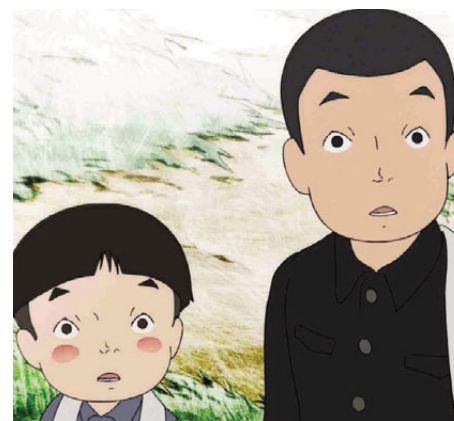
Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Cartoon films have been making audiences cry since the earliest Disney features, and Japan's *Giovanni's Island* is a first-class weepy. In part this is because it's not *just* a weepy: its tearful tragedy rides on a compelling story and a recognition that its child protagonists are only sharing in wider human sorrows, which other people have lived through and still endure. The setting is Shikotan, a northern Japanese island, at the time of World War II. After Japan's surrender, Shikotan is occupied by Russian forces, as shown through the eyes of two pre-teen brothers. In the tensest scene, the invading Soviets burst into the boys' school and the terrified teacher tries to prevent hysteria by carrying on with the class, even at gunpoint.

Directed by Nishikubo Mizuho (real name Nishikubo Toshihiko) and animated by the Production I.G studio, *Giovanni's Island* may be a 'real world' drama, but it is lightened both by the cartoon medium and by a particular narrative contrivance. The kids feel nearer to Charlie Brown than *Akira* – they're drawn with simple, loose lines, sometimes with cartoony distortions (for example when they wolf down their food). As usual with Japanese cartoons, the backgrounds are more detailed than the characters but still have a graphics-led edge. There are distorted perspectives, flattened picture-book scenery and pencil lines ingrained in the wood interiors where much of the film takes place.

The film introduces a fantasy element through the boys' love of the story *Night on the Galactic Railroad*. This is a real book, famous in Japan, about a train journey through space in search of 'the true heaven'. It was written by a Buddhist, Miyazawa Kenji, though it has prominent Christian imagery of giant heavenly crosses, and it became an outstanding anime film in 1985.

In *Giovanni's Island*, the boys and their father adore the book, quoting it at key points. The boys' names are based on the book's characters – the older brother Junpei corresponds to Giovanni in the book (hence the film's title), and Kanta to his friend Campanella. Naturally, the animation takes the opportunity to plunge the boys into their dreams, riding or chasing the



Shored up: *Giovanni's Island*

space train through luminous galaxies in brief but lyrical interludes; in a lovely sequence, the brothers' play with a toy train becomes a celestial light show. The later heartbreaking scenes, criticised in some quarters, imbue death with children's fantasy, which feels justly in keeping with how the whole film is constructed.

Giovanni's Island is exceptionally sad for a cartoon film, if not as devastating as *Barefoot Gen* (1983) or *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), two other Japanese animations about World War II. In *Fireflies*, the boy protagonist was shown making fatal mistakes in matters of survival. The same could be said of *Giovanni's Island*, where the boys embark on a reckless journey through a frozen Russian landscape. Ultimately, though, the film suggests that there are some mistakes a person cannot bear avoiding, when it comes to seeing a loved one for the last time.

As with Miyazaki Hayao's *The Wind Rises* (2013), the film may be accused of a covert political agenda. Russia's takeover of Shikotan and its neighbouring islands is still a matter of dispute in Japan; the film might also be seen as commenting indirectly on Japan's territorial disputes with China. Regardless, *Giovanni's Island* is excellent on its own terms, one of a growing number of recent Japanese cartoon films to honour the legacy of Studio Ghibli. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Miyagawa Tomoyuki
Sakurai Yoshiaki

Screenplay

Sugita Shigemichi
Sakurai Yoshiaki

Original Story

Sugita Shigemichi
Compositing

Director

Nakata Yumiko
Editor

General Art Director

Santiago Montiel
Sound Director

Lead Animation

Supervisor
Ito Nobutake

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Production
Companies

A Japan Association
of Music Enterprises

50th anniversary
project
In association with
Nihon Eiga Satellite

Broadcasting
Corporation Film Inc.

Produced by Japan
Association of
Music Enterprises

Executive Producer
Ishikawa Mitsuhiro

Voice Cast

Ichimura Masachika
Tatsuo

Nakama Yukie
Sawako

Yanagihara Kanako
Micchan

Santamaria Yusuke
Hideo

Yokoyama Kota
Junpei

Taniai Junya
Kanta

Ilyushenko Polina
Tanya

Kitajima Saburo
Genzo

Inuzuka Hiroshi
village chief

Yachigusa Kaoru
older Sawako

Nakadai Tatsuya
older Junpei

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
All the Anime

Japanese
theatrical title

Giovanni no Shima

Shikotan, a small Japanese island, 1945. Young Junpei and his little brother Kanta hear on the radio that Japan has surrendered to the Allies. Soon afterwards, Russian soldiers occupy Shikotan with their families. Junpei befriends Tanya, the daughter of a Russian commander. Tatsuo, the boys' widowed father, smuggles rice to help the Japanese islanders. When he's arrested, Junpei mistakenly blames Tanya for betraying him, though in fact Tatsuo's brother Hideo was responsible.

In 1947, the Soviets ship the Japanese islanders to Russian internment camps. Kanta falls sick, but when he hears that Tatsuo is not far away, he insists on seeing him. Sneaking out of their camp, the boys make a perilous journey through the freezing landscape. They have an emotional reunion with Tatsuo, separated by barbed wire, but they're arrested. Kanta dies soon afterwards, and Junpei is shipped to the Japanese mainland.

Fifty years later, Junpei visits Kanta and Tatsuo's family grave on the now Russian island. He learns that Tanya has died, but meets her daughter and granddaughter.

of Pitt's involvement, *Fury* inevitably faces comparison with Quentin Tarantino's trifling *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), though I was also reminded of Pitt's abusive patriarch in Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011). Ayer is more concerned with the nuts-and-bolts mechanics of combat than Tarantino, but is every bit as aware of his cinematic precedents. The opening of the film, which has Collier using his field knife to dispatch a German as he crosses a rutted no man's land of mud, recalls the beginning of Sam Fuller's *The Big Red One* (1980). The blowout set piece that concludes *Fury* draws from the same material that Tarantino parodied in his propaganda-film-within-a-film: the one-man-army stand of decorated soldier-turned-actor Audie Murphy, dramatised in the 1955 movie of his autobiography *To Hell and Back*. And then Ayer is forever standing in the shadow of Peckinpah, whose *The Wild Bunch* (1969) he was once slated to remake, and whose scenes of ensemble horseplay he has clearly studied at length.

Here the Peckinpah influence isn't in the battlefield material, which is designed for tactical crispness and real-time urgency rather than the slo-mo Sturm und Drang that typifies Bloody Sam's *Cross of Iron* (1977). Rather, it's most present in the film's lone chamber-drama set piece: having occupied a German village, Collier and Ellison bust in on two Fräuleins in their flat. Collier coerces Ellison into sleeping with the younger of the two – she goes along with this, hesitantly but consensually, in as much as consent can exist with the threat of force hanging in the air, and finally enthusiastically. The post-coital glow is dimmed, however, when the rest of the crew barge in looking for their turn, leading to an embittered dinner-table standoff that wobbles on the precipice of open violence for an agonisingly long time.

In its vacillation between menace and tenderness, its air of desire under fire, this scene treads some of the same treacherous territory as the is-it-Isn't-it attempted rape of Isela Vega by Kris Kristofferson in Peckinpah's *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974). It is thus totally un-PC, as is the contradiction at the heart of *Fury*, which the movie doesn't seek to resolve so much as exemplify – that war is horrible, and it is also majestic, and if it's going to happen anyway it might as well be done well. ("Do your job," or some variation thereof, is repeated throughout the film like a mantra.) The battle scenes, from first skirmish to Ragnarök finale, are done with queasy exhilaration, terrible lucidity and an almost worshipful reverence for the earth-shaking power of heavy ordnance.

I've never been fully convinced by an Ayer film before, in part because of his susceptibility to gruff sentimentality, which still threatens in *Fury* whenever there's a lull in the firing. But his latest is something different. Ayer, who served in a US Navy submarine before turning to screenwriting, has a rare feel for the symbiotic relationship that a tight-knit crew have with one another and with their vehicle. When the crew are in a hot spot, they jam together like a five-piece band sharpened by years on the road. In the heat of battle, Ayer locates a frantic rhythm and musicality – and he lets his heroes go down swinging. 📺

Going Away

France 2013
Director: Nicole Garcia
Certificate 12A 95m 9s

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

A respected stage and film actress in France since the 1970s, Nicole Garcia has also built a solid reputation as a director with now seven features, including *Place Vendôme* (1998, with Catherine Deneuve) and *The Adversary* (2002, with Daniel Auteuil). She works predominantly within the classical, intimate family melodrama familiar in French cinema from the features of Claude Sautet, André Téchiné, Claude Miller and more recently Olivier Assayas and Mia Hansen-Løve, who contain the traumas and conflicts that erupt in families and couples within the confines of elegantly understated filmmaking: raw emotions in nice surroundings, with classy performances. In many respects, *Going Away* continues this tradition.

The film, set in an unspecified location in the south of France, presents us with Baptiste (Pierre Rochefort), a young supply teacher who, having reached the end of his contract, surprises the head by turning down without explanation the offer of an extension. Similarly unexplained is the darkly shot opening scene showing a group of people being violently evicted; only much later are we able to piece the puzzle together and guess that this was Baptiste being thrown out of a squat.

Though he refuses to put down roots, Baptiste is sufficiently concerned to take in one of his pupils, Mathias (Mathias Brezot), left stranded for the weekend by his estranged parents' lack of planning. The boy introduces him to his mother Sandra (Louise Bourgoïn) in the seaside café where she works as a waitress. Sceptical at first, she warms to the sensitive (and good-looking) Baptiste. *Going Away* then unfolds in a series of quiet, allusive scenes – through which we pick up the fact that Baptiste's aloof demeanour hides a troubled personality reliant on strong medication, and that Sandra, in debt to the tune of €50,000, is threatened with reprisals if she doesn't pay it back. While it doesn't entirely avoid *longueurs*, this part of the film is subtle in its evocation of Baptiste and Sandra's budding relationship and the part played in it by Mathias, and original in its depiction of the modest milieu that mother and son inhabit.

Going Away switches gear with Baptiste's decision to take Sandra and her son to visit his family, who live nearby. It turns out that home is a château, and we are abruptly plunged into the more stereotypical – though more fun – world of the grand-bourgeois melodrama. Baptiste's family is gathered for Whitsun, enabling us to witness the rituals of the rich: crayfish, consommé, tennis and swimming pool against the background of the exquisite domain, complete with servants. Baptiste's father is dead and the family is now ruled by matriarch Liliane, played with magnificent hauteur by Dominique Sanda (who first came to notice in Robert Bresson's *A Gentle Woman* in 1969). While Liliane and Baptiste's sister Emmanuelle (Déborah François) have some complexity as characters, his two brothers are caricatures, obsessed with rank and money.

The fairly lurid events that are now revealed, in part through flashback – Baptiste's dropping out of brilliant university studies, his breakdown and incarceration, his fight with his father and his estrangement from the family – would not be



Debt-a-tête: Louise Bourgoïn, Mathias Brezot

out of place in a soap opera. As a result, Baptiste's emergence as a pure spirit, nobly detached from material contingencies and opposed to his crassly snobbish family, seems facile, and his decision to turn down his inheritance, apart from the €50,000 for Sandra, a trifle unbelievable. The extravagant gap between Baptiste's super-rich family and Sandra's world of scrambling to make ends meet inhibits any real social critique – even allowing for the implausibility of a supply teacher taking a pupil in for the weekend.

Going Away, like so many intimate French melodramas, relies for its appeal on its cast. Louise Bourgoïn as Sandra is cast against type but performs with her customary aplomb. Starting as a comic weather announcer on the television channel Canal+, she has often been cast in comic and/or sexy parts, as in *The Girl from Monaco* (2008) and *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle*

Blanc-Sec (2010). *Going Away* deliberately mutes her stunning looks by dyeing her hair dull brown and dressing her down, but she loses none of her appeal. In the central role (and his first major film part), Pierre Rochefort is quietly excellent, though it is difficult to abstract his performance from the fact that he is the son of the director (and his father is the renowned actor Jean Rochefort). This could be seen in two ways. On the one hand it confirms the ever-expanding hold of nepotism in contemporary French cinema. On the other, it adds piquancy to the figure of the mother in the film. As played by Sandra, she is attractive, formidable and unforgiving all at once. Family tensions are universal, but this added twist to an old story makes the film arguably a metaphor for the difficulties of a young man trying to assert himself against parents who have talent, status and money. 6

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Philippe Martin
Screenplay
Jacques Fieschi
Nicole Garcia
Director of Photography
Pierre Milon
Editing
Simon Jacquet
Production Designer
Véronique Barnéoud
Original Music Composed, Arranged and Performed by
Eric Neveux
Sound
Jean-Pierre Duret
Benoit Hillebrandt
Jean-Pierre Laforce
Costume Designer
Nathalie Du Roscoat

©LFP, Les Films Pelléas, France 3
Cinéma, Pauline's
Angel, Appaloosa
Distribution
Production Companies
Les Films Pelléas
presents in
co-production

with France 3
Cinéma, Pauline's
Angel, Appaloosa
Distribution
with the participation
of Canal +, OCS
in association with
Cofinova 9, Hoche
Images, Soficinéma 9
with the participation
of France Télévisions
with the support of La
Région Languedoc-
Roussillon, La Région
Midi-Pyrénées
in partnership
with CNC
in association
with Wild Bunch
A film by Nicole Garcia
Developed with the
support of Cofinova
Development 4

Cast
Louise Bourgoïn
Sandra
Pierre Rochefort
Baptiste Cambière
Dominique Sanda
Liliane Cambière
Déborah François
Emmanuelle

Cambière
Eric Ruf
Gilles Cambière
Benjamin Lavernhe
Thomas Cambière
Jean-Pierre Martins
Balou
Olivier Loustau
Mathias' father
Mathias Brezot
Mathias

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

French theatrical title
Un beau dimanche

South of France, the present. Baptiste, a young supply teacher, is coming to the end of his contract at a primary school. Despite the offer of extended employment, he decides to move on. However, he notices that one of his pupils, Mathias, has been left alone for the weekend due to a misunderstanding between his estranged parents. Baptiste takes Mathias to his mother, Sandra, who works at a seaside café, and the three begin a hesitant friendship. On a night out, Sandra encourages Baptiste to drink, against his will; she discovers that this makes him ill because he is on strong medication. Sandra is pursued by two men demanding the €50,000 they lent her for a (failed) restaurant venture.

Baptiste takes Sandra and Mathias, unannounced, to his parents' nearby estate while a family reunion is in full swing. We learn that, rejected for his lack of ambition by a wealthy and status-conscious family, he suffered a breakdown and incarceration in a mental institution. In flashback, we see his father trying to prevent him living as a vagrant after leaving the institution, and his sister Emmanuelle watching in horror as the two come to violent blows. Baptiste's mother and brothers make no attempt to conceal their contempt for the lower-class Sandra. When his brothers offer him €50,000 as an advance on his inheritance, he takes it, rejecting the rest, and leaves with Sandra, with whom he is in love, and Mathias.

The Great Museum

Austria 2014
Director: Johannes Holzhausen
Certificate PG 94m 20s

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

A quite delightful pair of images opens *The Great Museum*, Johannes Holzhausen's documentary study of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum. On a broad marble staircase, a cleaner tickles the testes of Canova's statue of Theseus with a tiny dusting brush, readying him for his public. In another room, the smooth plains of a parquet floor splinter and rend as a pickaxe smashes into them. In different ways, the two scenes seem to announce an irreverent exposé that will tear away the glossy veneer of a well-loved institution. In fact, we're given quite the opposite: a film so in thrall to its subject matter that it might as well be a corporate video. Like the museum itself, it is polished, elegant, rarefied and rather alienating, especially for viewers with little or no knowledge of art history.

Shot between 2012 and 2013 during the renovation of the museum's celebrated Kunstammer Wien galleries, Holzhausen's behind-the-scenes study borrows thematically and stylistically from the work of Frederick Wiseman (whose *National Gallery* premiered at Cannes this year). There's no voiceover, no talking heads, no captions or interviews. Even the artworks are unnamed. Instead we are gently guided from board meeting to conservation workshop, auction room to archive, with Holzhausen's camera following at a respectful distance.

In one standout sequence he traces the path of a young employee riding a push scooter over hardwood floors on a clerical errand, the camera presumably perched behind on a similar vehicle. Otherwise the film's most interesting scenes focus on the processes of presentation and maintenance. A Dutch conservator discovers that a Rubens has been painted over several times, for example, while a pair of stiff-faced curators bicker over the best configuration for the new gallery. Insects are picked from canvases; the joint is combed for moths. Everything is just so, like those high-class holiday resorts where every morning the sand is sieved before breakfast.

A trained art historian, Holzhausen describes himself in the press notes as "a fallen peer" of the museum's senior staff. Watching the film, one gets the sense that he is part of an in-crowd. He isn't above poking fond fun at his subjects – most effectively during a board meeting where a passive-aggressive debate over a choice of font breaks out – but on the whole there's little sense of challenge. It's a far cry from Jem



Ribbit exhibit: *The Great Museum*

Cohen's lyrical *Museum Hours* (2012), which viewed the same gallery through a security guard's eyes and lingered on the detritus and dust that gathered in corners. Here, the museum's status as national icon is repeatedly stressed: in the crane shots emphasising the building's majesty; the recurring image of Maria Theresa; the donation of an imperial uniform; the visit by Federal President Heinz Fischer. The Hapsburg legacy hovers over all we see. The marketing people know that for many this is the museum's great appeal, hence their decision to rename the affiliated treasury the Imperial Treasury.

The one chink in the gallery's metaphorical armour shows up in the form of a plucky member of the museum's 'guest services team' (read floor staff), who summons the courage during a brand-awareness exercise to tell her bosses that she and her colleagues feel undervalued, sidelined: after 11 years at the museum, she says sadly, she has never met anyone from another department. It's an intriguing moment but Holzhausen swiftly dispatches it and the employee disappears from view, resurfacing only briefly in the film's final moments. I would have liked her to have been named, but while the likes of gallery director Sabine Haag and chief financial officer Paul Frey have their names in lights, Holzhausen's film leaves her uncredited. ☹

Haider

Director: Vishal Bhardwaj
Certificate 15 159m 34s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

The annals of Indian cinema are littered with Shakespeare adaptations, given the universal themes of much of his work. *Hamlet* has had several Indian outings, including K.B. Athavale's *Khoon-E-Nahak* (1928), Sohrab Modi's *Khoon Ka Khoon* (1935) and Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* (1954). *Haider*, the latest Indian adaptation, is director Vishal Bhardwaj's third venture into Bard territory after *Maqbool* (*Macbeth*, 2003) and *Omkara* (*Othello*, 2006). Bhardwaj set *Maqbool* in the Mumbai mafia milieu and *Omkara* in the badlands of northern India; for *Haider*, he relocates the Prince of Denmark to Kashmir, a paradise on earth over which India and Pakistan have fought three wars since 1947, with both countries controlling two significant chunks of the region and China a third. After a period of relative peace, when Indian films were regularly shot there, Kashmir flared up again in the late 1980s, with some groups demanding accession to Pakistan and others an independent state, leading to a strong army presence in the vale. *Haider* is set during the height of those troubles, in 1995.

Bhardwaj and his co-writer Basharat Peer, a well-known commentator on Kashmir, substitute Pakistan for Norway: Hamlet's father is now a doctor; Gertrude is a teacher; Claudius is a politician; and in a delicious reimagining echoing the heyday of Bollywood in the valley, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are video library managers who constantly ape the star Salman Khan. Hamlet (Haider) himself is now a student, studying the revolutionary poets of British India. Searching for his father, who was taken away by the Indian army and has joined the rank's of the disappeared, Haider finds himself thrust into the harsh reality of life for the common Kashmiri. Of all the versions of *Hamlet*, Bhardwaj's interpretation is closest in spirit to Grigory Kozintsev's 1964 adaptation, with Kashmir replacing post-Stalinist Russia. Bhardwaj and Peer take their time setting the political context but once that environment is established the human drama is brought to the forefront, while the politics simmers in the background.

Unlike the austere beauty of Kozintsev's



Slings and arrows: Shahid Kapoor, Tabu

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Johannes
Rosenberger
Written by
Johannes Holzhausen
Constantin Wulff

Photography

Joerg Burger
Attilla Boa

Editor

Dieter Pichler
Sound
Andreas Pils
Andreas Hamza

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Production

Companies

A Navigator Film
production
Made with the
support of
Österreichisches
Filminstitut, ORF
(Film-/Fernseh-
Abkommen),
Filmstandort Austria,
Filmfonds Wien
Project Development
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Filmfonds Wien,
Österreichisches
Filminstitut

Dolby Digital

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor

Matchbox Films

Austrian
theatrical title

Das grosse Museum

A documentary taking a behind-the-scenes look at the running of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum. Shot between 2012 and 2013 during the renovation of the museum's Kunstammer Wien galleries, the film opens as the old galleries are stripped down and closes with the launch party for the new exhibit. The museum uses the Kunstammer opening as an opportunity to take stock and rebrand, a decision that affects everyone from the management team to the floor staff. As well as offering glimpses of the day-to-day routine at the museum, the film also takes in more significant occasions such as a visit from Federal President Heinz Fischer and the retirement of a long-serving staff member.

monochrome frames, *Haider* bursts with colour and vitality, throwing the travails of Kashmir into sharp relief. That Bhardwaj has managed to achieve this despite the indignity of his film receiving 41 cuts from the Indian censors (including the removal of shots of genital torture and severed body parts) is commendable indeed. Shahid Kapoor, whom Bhardwaj lifted out of Bollywood song-and-dance purgatory with the thriller *Kaminey* (2009), does a credible job as Haider but pales next to Tabu, a dominant presence as his mother Ghazala, whose performance is reminiscent of her terrific Nimmi/Lady Macbeth in *Maqbool*. Despite this, *Haider* is a powerful look at one of the most troubled regions of the world, and a highly effective retelling of *Hamlet* that works all the better for not sticking slavishly to Shakespeare's text. It can take its rightful place alongside *Harud* (2010) by Aamir Bashir, seen here as Liyaqat/Laertes, as one of the best films on the Kashmir situation. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Siddharth Roy Kapur Vishal Bhardwaj	in association with Vishal Bhardwaj Pictures presents a Vishal Bhardwaj film	Rajat Bhagat Salman and Salman, courtiers
Written by Vishal Bhardwaj Basharat Peer Based on <i>Hamlet</i> by William Shakespeare	Cast Shahid Kapoor Haider Shraddha Kapoor Arshia Lone Tabu Ghazala Kay Kay Menon Khurram Irrfan Khan Roohdar Narendra Jha Dr Hilal Meer Kulbhushan Kharbanda Hussain Mir Lalit Parimoo Pervaz Lone Aashish Vidyarthi Brigadier T.S. Murthy Aamir Bashir Liyaqat Sumit Kaul	In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Director of Photography Pankaj Kumar	Distributor IG Interactive Entertainment	
Editor Arif Sheikh		
Production Designers Subrata Chakraborty Amit Ray		
Music Vishal Bhardwaj		
Sound Shajith Koyeri		
Costume Designer Dolly Ahluwalia		
Choreographer Sudesh Adhana		
Production Companies UTV Motion Pictures		

Kashmir, India, 1995. The Indian army arrests Dr Hilal Meer for treating a wanted militant and he becomes another of the many disappeared Kashmiri men. Hilal's son Haider returns from university. He sees his uncle Khurram, an influential politician, flirting with his mother Ghazala, and storms off. With the help of his friends Salman and Salman and his girlfriend Arshia, who is the daughter of local police superintendent Pervaz, Haider sets about looking for his father. Roohdar tells Haider that he was Hilal's cellmate in an army prison. Hilal, now dead, told Roohdar it was Khurram who betrayed him; he wants Haider to avenge his death and Khurram's affair with Ghazala. Pervaz informs Haider that Roohdar is a Pakistani agent who has told him a false story to implicate Khurram. Confused, Haider becomes unstable. Khurram and Ghazala marry; after the wedding, Haider stages a puppet show that suggests their guilt. Haider is committed to an asylum but he escapes. He calls Ghazala and she convinces him to meet her. Pervaz arrives and in the confusion Haider shoots him dead. Hiding in a graveyard, Haider is shocked to witness the funeral of Arshia, who has committed suicide. Ghazala and Khurram arrive with the army. A shootout ensues and Haider is wounded. Ghazala blows herself up and Khurram loses his legs. Khurram begs Haider to kill him but Haider leaves.

Hockney

United Kingdom/USA 2014
Director: Randall Wright
Certificate 15 112m 26s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Anyone who could wander the streets of 1950s Bradford in a starched collar and bowler hat, pushing an easel around in a pram, was clearly destined for something. David Hockney has since become something of a national treasure, a prolific and versatile artist who has gained an international reputation while never losing touch with his working-class Yorkshire background, held in high critical regard while remaining popular with a broad public.

Now in his late seventies, Hockney is an affable, unpretentious onscreen presence throughout this appreciative biographical doc, featuring a whole wealth of arts TV archive gathered together by director Randall Wright, who's also had access to Hockney's own precious Polaroids, home movies and camcorder footage. Given the sundry friends and colleagues also on hand to offer affectionate comment, and space to be found for the work itself, there's evidently a twofold challenge here: first, fitting everything in so that the viewer can get a handle on the voluminous catalogue of life and work; second, communicating some deeper understanding about the man behind the iconic LA swimming-pool canvases and life-affirming latterday epic landscapes.

Wright does very well by the first of these and, as Jack Hazan discovered before him, is on a bit of a hiding to nothing with the second. As a compendium of Hockney's restlessly shape-shifting output and the people and places in his life, *Hockney* is a pleasure to spend time with, delivering what's in essence a cinematic gallery guide to the Hockney exhibition of your dreams. And cinematic it is too, giving the locations from Bradford to Beverly Hills proper room to breathe, allowing us to root around the old boy's various studios and residences, and presenting the canvases in brilliant hi-def digital, which does justice to the acrylic zing of his early Californian era and the widescreen multi-part vistas of Yorkshire that have creatively re-energised him in recent years.

By returning time and again to Hockney's Bradford family connections, Wright keeps a tight rein on the film's overall rhythm and timeframe, crucial when there's so much material to get through, but he has obviously made a



Splash of genius: David Hockney

decision to leave issues of critical perspective to one side. The tone is warm and admirably curatorial throughout, leaving us with the sense that in his mazy artistic journey (from painting to drawing, photographic collage to printmaking and even rather dainty iPhone sketches) Hockney has never made a misstep – which feels just a tad soft on an artist who, we're told, has often been hard on himself.

Wright fares better when allowing Hockney the space to talk about his methods, and the phrase "ways of seeing" keeps popping up, usefully highlighting the notion – common to Hockney's diverse chosen media – that his largely representational approach encourages the viewer to perceive the world with fresh eyes. Evidently, Hockney himself is someone who can stand back and really look – hence the meticulously traced imprint of swimming-pool spray in what is probably his most famous painting – though with that perhaps there is a price to be paid. Today's avuncular figure is far removed from the slightly lost, emotionally marooned individual in Hazan's remarkable 1973 hybrid drama-doc *A Bigger Splash*, but it's as if there remains something essentially unknowable about him. This is deftly hinted at by the memorable closing sequence, which has Hockney padding through the brightly coloured verandas and refulgent greenery of his LA pad as John Harle's charming score strikes up deliberate echoes of Jacques Tati. Wright graciously leaves us by intriguingly positing Hockney as a sort of art-world Hulot – ever curious, a loveable optimist, a man apart. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Kate Ogborn Randall Wright	British Film Company and the Smithsonian Channel present a Blakeway and Fly Film production	Charles Poe Film Extracts <i>Love's Presentation</i> (1966)
Director of Photography Patrick Duval	First Class Hero Productions Ltd has been supported by the Yorkshire Content Fund Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund	In Colour [1.85:1]
Editor Paul Binns	Executive Producers Denys Blakeway Lisa Marie Russo Lizzie Francke Mark Bell Hugo Heppell Steve Milne Christian Eisenbeiss David Royle	Distributor Picturehouse Entertainment
Music Composed and Conducted by John Harle		
Sound Recordist Geoff Price		
Production Companies BFI and BBC Arts in association with Screen Yorkshire,		

A documentary tracing the life and work of British artist David Hockney, now 77. Comprising newly shot interviews with Hockney and various friends and colleagues, it collates television and film archive, plus home video and Polaroids provided by the artist. The film retraces Hockney's early progress from working-class Bradford beginnings and study at the Royal College of Art to a 1960s sojourn in California that prompted some of his best-known paintings. The film also sketches in the shifting relationships in his personal life, alongside the continuing creative restlessness in his later career. We see him moving from painting to drawing; working frequently as a set designer for opera; developing a new interest in photographic collage; creating art on the latest handheld devices; and finally returning to large-scale landscape painting. What remains consistent is an interest in finding new ways to look at the world, and a continuing sense of connection to his Yorkshire roots.

Honeymoon

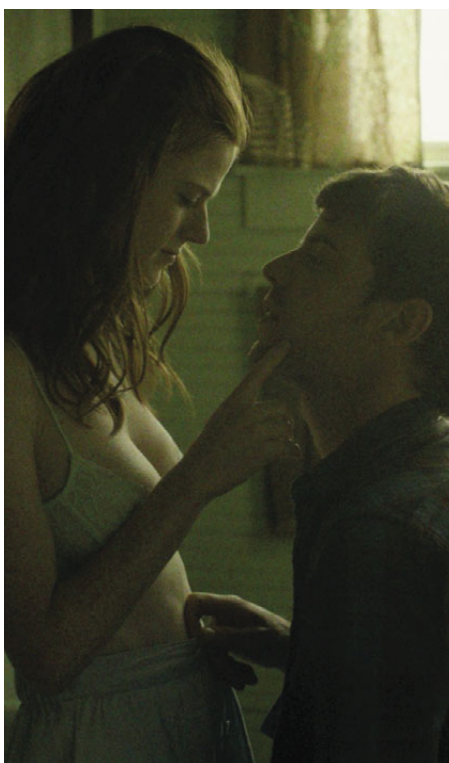
USA 2013
Director: Leigh Janiak
Certificate 15 87m 30s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Leigh Janiak's debut feature seems to be a deliberate riff – in a quiet, minimalist way – on Gene Fowler Jr's luridly titled, surprisingly acute paranoia movie *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958), in which a honeymoon is similarly disrupted when one partner (in that case, bridegroom Tom Tryon) is replaced by a shapeshifting alien invader who's come to Earth to mate with the locals but seemingly has no idea how to deal with his new wife (Gloria Talbott). A literalisation of the 'men are from Mars, women are from Venus' theory, Fowler's film has been rethought before – with alien-possessed women – in John Krish's underrated *Unearthly Stranger* (1964) and the daffy comedy *My Stepmother Is an Alien* (1988). In all variations on this theme, a new family member reveals a sinister side, often expressed through unfamiliarity with the simple rituals of everyday humanity, but has a semi-plausible explanation that shreds as the nightmare closes in.

Janiak cosily establishes Bea and Paul as a cute couple in their wedding video diary, which aligns the film to the found-footage trend. However, the rest of the picture uses a more conventional narrative style that makes this very much the husband's subjective take on what is happening. The newlyweds are packed off alone to an isolated lakefront cabin for their honeymoon, and the charm leaches out of the place even before Bea has her close encounter with something in the woods. Especially unnerving is a quietly played sequence in an out-of-season local restaurant where the unaccountably angry proprietor tries to turn on the charm when he recognises Bea as a childhood friend – the cabin is her family's holiday retreat – but is too rattled by his odd, sullen wife to act normally. Paul plainly thinks Bea has a history with the restaurateur that she doesn't want to tell him about, and this seems for a while to be reason enough for her sudden strange behaviour. But one day Bea can barely put her hand in the freezing water of the lake and the next she's jumping in enthusiastically; she's forgotten how to cook dishes she used to prepare well; and she can't explain the shredded nightie Paul finds in the woods after she has vanished for a while.

Paul's paranoia escalates as he is unsure whether his wife has been altered or replaced – a subject on which the film is eerily ambiguous, hinting that this is still Bea's body but her mind is being usurped by another intelligence. In a



The odd couple: Rose Leslie, Harry Treadaway

gruesome body-horror moment that touches on alien abduction mythology, a snake-like umbilical organ is pulled out of Bea's vagina, only for the parasitic tentacle to serve as a ripcord that seems to hasten her transformation into something non-human. It's plain that whoever the invaders are, they have targeted our women for takeover and our men for elimination, but – as in *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* and *Unearthly Stranger* – the taken-over spouse retains her human host's feelings, and goes against her own programming to try to save her husband. In a quiet, genuinely shocking climax, the alienated Bea weighs Paul down with an anchor so that he can 'hide' underwater, even as he tries to explain to her that this won't work.

Defly played by attractive leads Rose Leslie and Harry Treadaway, whose ideal-couple looks turn effectively sinister in the half-light, with vivid cameos from Ben Huber and Hanna Brown as the only interlopers in this two-character drama, *Honeymoon* is a striking, unsettling first feature. 🍷

I Am Ali

USA/United Kingdom 2013
Director: Clare Lewins
Certificate PG 111m 22s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

That Muhammad Ali was The Greatest we already know – he informed the press and his public of this fact many, many times. There was even a 1969 documentary by the Franco-American photographer William Klein called *Muhammad Ali, the Greatest*, one of a slew of films about the man who, along with John Wayne and Bruce Lee, vies for the title of most famous male icon of the 20th century.

The latest of these is *I Am Ali* by Clare Lewins, which reconfirms its subject's greatness yet again. "Boxing was just something he did," says George Foreman, who goes on to call his old 'Rumble in the Jungle' opponent not just one of the greatest fighters who ever lived, but one of the greatest men. "You can't measure [Ali] in the word great," says Mike Tyson, never at a loss when it comes to giving good quote, "There has to be another word created." Hana Ali, Ali's daughter with third wife Veronica Porsche, recalls her mother being reduced to tears after seeing a glimpse of God in her ex-husband's face. As you can well imagine, after a while all of this gets pretty redundant.

Literally the only words said against Ali in nearly two hours of screen time come in Porsche's tossed-off statement that "The whole world knew he wasn't faithful as a husband." Earlier, as friend Jim Brown talks about Ali, there is a clip of him voicing the segregationist sentiments that he espoused during the height of his fealty to Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad, but this isn't given another thought. Nor, after an archival footage appearance by Malcolm X, who is heard expressing his admiration for the Champ, is there any discussion of Ali's abandonment of Malcolm at Muhammad's behest, during a schism between the Nation of Islam leadership. I do not mention any of these items because they necessarily make Ali less than The Greatest. In fact, they make him human, and we have seen the human Ali far less often than the demigod.

I Am Ali seeks to justify its existence in a crowded field of Aliana through the use of never-before-heard private recordings that its subject made of his own phone conversations. (It seems that Ali shared a passion for self-surveillance with another American icon of the 60s and 70s, Richard M. Nixon.) Most



Stings like a bee: *I Am Ali*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Patrick Baker
Esmé Howard

Written by

Phil Graziadei

Leigh Janiak

Cinematographer

Kyle Klütz

Editor

Christopher S. Capp

Production Designer

Chris Trujillo

Music

Heather McIntosh

Sound Mixer

Thomas Curley

Costume Designer

Courtney Arthur

©Honeymoon

Productions Inc.

Production

Company

Fewlas Entertainment

presents

Executive Producers

Christopher A. Pilaro

Phoebe Pilaro

Julie Parker Benello

Allen C. Benello

John R. Dufour

Brandon J. Dufour

Daniel Troiano

Cast

Rose Leslie

Bea

Harry Treadaway

Paul

Ben Huber

Will

Hanna Brown

Annie

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Arrow Film

Distributors Ltd

US, present day. Newlyweds Bea and Paul honeymoon in a lakefront cabin. Visiting a local restaurant, they find Will, the proprietor, in a bad temper because his wife Annie is acting strangely. Will recognises Bea as an old friend and tries to be welcoming. At night Bea sleepwalks into the woods and has an encounter that prompts her to act out of character, forgetting what she knows and drawing away from Paul. In pain, she tries to remove a worm-like creature from her vagina – which she does with Paul's help. She admits that another power is controlling her but declares that she will protect Paul from it, which she does by 'hiding' him in the lake, seemingly unaware that he will drown. With Paul dead, Bea and Annie walk towards the lights that represent an alien power.

of these merely allow us to eavesdrop on Ali talking to his young children, and while they show an unusually attentive and loving father, they are not otherwise enormously revealing of the Champ's inner life.

Like Klein's *Muhammad Ali, the Greatest*, Lewins's *I Am Ali* is not terribly interested in the Sweet Science of Bruising itself – I would hazard a guess that altogether it contains less than ten minutes' ringside footage, though special attention is granted to Sir Henry Cooper's knockdown and near-knockout of Ali – then Cassius Clay – in a 1963 bout. As a UK/US co-production, *I Am Ali* concedes some attention to Ali's relationship with his British fans, including a Tyneside man, Russ Routledge, whom Ali invited to stay at his own property. What a great guy, right? The Greatest! But is that all? 



Man on fire: Muhammad Ali

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Clare Lewins
George Chignell
Greg Hobden
Written by
Clare Lewins
Director of Photography
Stuart Luck
Film Editor
Reg Wrench
Sound Recordists
Los Angeles/
Las Vegas:
Adam Joseph
David Brill

©Universal Studios
Production Companies
Focus World
presents a Fisheye
Films production
in association with
Passion Pictures
A Clare Lewins film

Executive Producers
John Battsek
Simon Chinn

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

A documentary about three-times world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali. Through interviews with Ali's family, friends and former rivals, the film looks back to his boyhood in Louisville, Kentucky, where he was born Cassius Clay in 1942; to his gold medal performance at the 1960 Rome Olympics; and to his surprise victory over Sonny Liston in the world heavyweight championship in 1964. At around this time, Clay joined the Nation of Islam (and changed his name to Ali). He subsequently refused to be conscripted by the US Army to serve in Vietnam, and was stripped of his title. His boxing ban was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1970, and he returned to fight a series of legendary bouts, among them the 'Rumble in the Jungle' against George Foreman and three fights against Joe Frazier.

In 1981, Ali attempted his final comeback, the 'Drama in Bahama', but he was already affected by undiagnosed Parkinson's disease, and lost by a unanimous decision to Trevor Berbick.

The Imitation Game

USA 2014

Director: Morten Tyldum

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

"Are you paying attention?" asks Benedict Cumberbatch's Alan Turing – mathematician, pioneer of computer science and codebreaker extraordinaire – as he prepares to disclose his secrets in the opening scenes of *The Imitation Game*. The nation that appallingly wronged Turing after he played an instrumental part in protecting it during WWII has certainly paid belated attention in recent years: first, the Gordon Brown government's 2009 apology for the charge of gross indecency and subsequent order of chemical castration that preceded Turing's 1954 suicide by two years; then, in 2013, a posthumous royal pardon. This year alone has seen two separate Turing-inspired musical productions, the only prior dramatisations being Hugh Whitmore's 1986 stage play *Breaking the Code* and its later BBC adaptation (both starring Derek Jacobi as Turing). Michael Apted's 2001 feature *Enigma* removed Turing from the equation entirely, furnishing the Bletchley Park codebreaking centre with wholly fictional characters. The manifold variety of these depictions gives pause for thought: how to represent this most complex of historical figures? In the hands of *Headhunters* director Morten Tyldum and debutant screenwriter Graham Moore, the result is an efficient, impeccably mounted but pedestrian biopic.

Drawn from Andrew Hodges's 1983 biography, Moore's script shuttles between a framing police interview following Turing's post-war arrest, the pivotal war years at Bletchley, where Turing and his fellow cryptologists – including Joan Clarke (Keira Knightley) and Hugh Alexander (Matthew Goode) – broke the Nazis' Enigma cipher against all odds, and flashbacks to the young Turing's formative bond with a classmate (whose name he later lends to the ingenious machine, or 'bombe', that ultimately cracks Enigma by imitating its settings). The tagline-ready maxim offered by the latter – "It's often the people no one imagines anything of who do

the things no one can imagine" – is repeatedly reprised; similarly declamatory dialogue tends to ring forth throughout *The Imitation Game*.

Recruited by Bletchley in 1939, Turing immediately riles Charles Dance's withering commander by overanalysing the most innocuous of quips. The scene neatly establishes Turing's singular personality and thought processes, which initially render him an inscrutable, fractious figure in the eyes of colleagues: a man on solid ground with algorithms but frequently at sea with interpersonal communication. Fragile solidarity eventually follows, as the team persists in the face of shortsighted bureaucracy and scant resources. Tyldum – whose direction is capable but nondescript – brings a measure of the clammy tension that suffused *Headhunters* to these sequences, regularly splicing them with ominous montages of the war's daily toll.

The painful irony for Turing was that he was forced to conceal his homosexuality while simultaneously unmasking secrets for the country that made it a crime. This is dealt with sensitively, although there may be some credence to Hodges's pre-production complaints that it's viewed largely through the prism of Turing's brief engagement to Clarke. While she didn't face the same dangers as Turing, Clarke – a resilient egghead in an oppressively male-dominated realm, played persuasively by Knightley – nonetheless resonates as another important signifier of progressive defiance. Moore's eager-to-please screenplay, on the other hand, plays its own imitation game, in being beholden to formula (Ron Howard's *A Beautiful Mind*, for one) – a manufactured quality that occasionally creeps into Cumberbatch's otherwise committed, fastidious performance. It's a consummately polished package, one that will no doubt gain its subject a deservedly wide audience. But unlike Turing and the elaborate codes he busted, *The Imitation Game* all too readily reveals its calculated design. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nora Grossman
Ido Ostrowsky
Teddy Schwarzman
Written by
Graham Moore
Based on the
book *Alan Turing*:
The Enigma by
Andrew Hodges
Director of Photography
Oscar Faura
Film Editor
William Goldenberg
Production Designer
Maria Djurkovic
Music
Alexandre Desplat
Production Sound Mixer
John Midgley
Costume Designer
Sammy Sheldon
Differ

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Production Companies
Black Bear

Pictures presents
in association
with Filmmation
Entertainment a
Black Bear Pictures
production
A Bristol Automotive
production
Supported by TFI
Sloan Filmmaker
Fund, a year round
program of the
Tribeca Film Institute
The Weinstein
Company
Executive Producer
Graham Moore

Cast
Benedict Cumberbatch
Alan Turing
Keira Knightley
Joan Clarke
Matthew Goode
Hugh Alexander
Rory Kinnear
Detective
Robert Nock

Allen Leech
John Cairncross
Matthew Beard
Peter Hilton
Charles Dance
Commander
Denniston
Mark Strong
Stewart Menzies

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

Manchester, 1952. Mathematician Alan Turing reports a burglary at his home. He is later arrested after admitting a homosexual relationship with the thief. Interviewed by a detective, Turing relates his life story.

In 1939, Turing is recruited by the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park, where classified work has commenced on deciphering German communications encrypted using the Enigma machine. Turing hires Joan Clarke, an analyst with whom he develops a close bond. Turing creates a machine, or 'bombe', designed to replicate Enigma's settings. Turing's colleagues are at first alienated by his unsociable manner, but when the bombe initially fails to obtain results, they rally to prevent his dismissal and the machine's deactivation. Turing and Joan become engaged. When the team breaks Enigma, Turing proposes that the military act on only a fraction of intercepted communications in order to avoid German suspicion. Turing's colleague John Cairncross is unmasked as a Soviet spy. The war over, Turing tells Joan he cannot marry her, despite her acceptance of his homosexuality.

In 1952, Turing pleads guilty to the charges, accepting chemical castration over a prison term. He commits suicide in 1954.

Leviathan

Russian Federation 2014
Director: Andrey Zvyagintsev

See Feature
on page 26

Reviewed by Ryan Gilbey

A journey by car in an Andrey Zvyagintsev film is typically something to be dreaded. His masterful 2003 debut *The Return* hinges on a long and traumatic road trip; its 2007 follow-up *The Banishment* opens with a vehicle being driven in haste by a man who is in the process of losing an awful lot of blood. No one could be blamed, then, for fearing the worst in his latest picture, *Leviathan*. After shots of waves lashing rocks under the gaze of a mountainous landscape, we see a man, Kolia, driving through the grey light to collect his friend Dmitri from the train station. Later there will indeed be a suspenseful car journey, but for now any tension is restricted to legal matters: Dmitri is a Moscow lawyer preparing to fight Kolia's corner against the corrupt mayor, Vadim. The latter is trying to snatch from Kolia the coastal plot on which he has built the house where he lives with his wife and child. Over the subsequent 140 minutes, the class tensions of Zvyagintsev's *Elena* (2011) combine with the domestic angst of *The Banishment* to produce a film that is more troubling and ambitiously scaled than either.

If the biblical connotations of the title suggest drama of the highfalutin variety, the perspective offers a worm's-eye view. From the grimly hilarious court appeal, in which the particulars are read by a judge in a one-take breakneck monologue that leaves no room for breath, let alone interjection, there is never any likelihood that Kolia will triumph against the system. (The movie may be bleak but it is also surprisingly abundant and nuanced in its use of humour.) That title, after all, refers not only to the whales glimpsed in the Barents Sea – or to their cavernous skeletons, among which Kolia's son wanders. It applies also (as it does in Thomas Hobbes's 1651 book of the same name, alluded to in the film) to the monstrous forces of government against which men such as Kolia, compared specifically by the town priest to Job, can only offer stoical resignation.

The pleasure of the film lies in its forensic skill at unpicking the intersecting layers of governmental corruption and calumny that doom the working class from the outset. There would be no mistaking Zvyagintsev's hitherto opaque political allegiances, even if one only had the target-practice scene to go on. Having exhausted their supply of empty beer bottles, a shooting party turns to framed portraits of Russian leaders. Vladimir Putin is conspicuous by his absence. "It's too early for the current ones," says the policeman leading the shoot. "Let them ripen on the walls." But a scene in which Putin's image watches sinisterly over an exchange between Vadim and Dmitri, not to mention a later glimpse on a television screen of the words 'Pussy Riot', leaves no doubt as to the filmmaker's sympathies.

Kolia may ask, pleadingly, "Why, Lord?" during a moment of suffering, but religion offers neither answers nor hope. Indeed, it is a priest who expressly persuades Vadim to stick to his guns in the land dispute and to regard his own power as synonymous with the divine one. Mapping this corroded moral structure in



State of revolution: Alexey Serebryakov

script form is something at which Zvyagintsev and his co-writer Oleg Negin excel. They may resort at times, both here and in *The Banishment*, to the use of the wife figure as a repository for pain rather than a character in her own right. But it would be churlish to dispute the crushing logic, the symbiotic inevitability, that underpins every plot-point, however minor.

Zvyagintsev's talents extend far beyond that. What makes him an artist rather than simply a craftsman is his ability to express in visual and aural terms the themes and tensions that drive the narrative. Philip Glass's music is imposing enough, even without knowing that it has been transplanted from his 1983 opera *Akhmaten*,

which explored power and religion through the story of the pharaoh who pioneered monotheism. Coupled with the dusky cinematography of Mikhail Krichman, the effect is at once breathtaking and oppressive. The majority of the picture, whether interior or exterior, has been lit and shot to create pools of darkness in the foreground (in some scenes, the actors are reduced almost to silhouettes). Illumination does exist in this world – the mountains in the distance are often streaked with sunlight. In common with hope and comprehension, that illumination lies stranded forever in the distance, frustratingly beyond the reach of Kolia and his woebegone countrymen. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Alexander
Rodnyanskiy
Sergey Melkumov

Screenplay

Oleg Negin
Andrey Zvyagintsev

Cinematography

Mikhail Krichman

Editing

Anna Mass

Production Designer

Andrey Ponkratov

Sound

Andrey Dergachev

Costumes

Dumegues

Anna Bartuli

@Non-Stop

Production

Production

Companies

A Non-Stop
Production film
With the support
of the Ministry
of Culture of the
Russian Federation,
Cinema Fund and
RuArts Foundation
Executive Producer
Ekaterina Marakulina

Cast

Alexey Serebryakov
Kolia
Elena Lyadova
Lilya
Vladimir
Vdovichenkov
Dmitri
Roman Madyanov
Vadim
Vladimir
Shellevyat
Anna Ukolova

Angela
Alexey Rozin
Pacha
Sergey Pokhodaev
Roma
Valeriy Grishko
Bishop
Sergey Bachurskiy
Stepanych
Platon Kamenev
Victor

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

Northwest Russia, the present. Kolia is ordered to surrender to local mayor Vadim the seafront house he shares with his second wife, Lilya, and his son from his first marriage, Roma. He enlists his friend, Moscow lawyer Dmitri, to represent him. Dmitri has a dossier of information with which he blackmails Vadim into backing down. Hoping for re-election, Vadim is preparing to relent when he receives advice from a priest, who tells him that all power comes from God. With this in mind, Vadim arranges for Dmitri to be beaten up. Kolia has also had reason to turn against Dmitri after discovering that he has been having an affair with Lilya. Kolia makes peace with her despite Roma's tearful protestations.

But with Dmitri having returned to Moscow, Kolia's home is now vulnerable once again to Vadim. Kolia goes to pick up Lilya from her factory job but finds that she has not attended work that day and that her phone number is unreachable. Lilya is found dead on the beach. Kolia rails against the local priest, who tells him the story of Job. Homicide detectives burst into Kolia's home to arrest him for Lilya's murder. He is found guilty and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment, leaving the way clear for the house to be knocked down and the land seized by Vadim. Roma is offered a home by friends of his father. Vadim attends a church service where he tells his own son that God sees everything.

Life Itself

USA 2014

Director: Steve James

See Feature
on page 40

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

Every reader knows how it feels to be intimately familiar with a writer's 'voice' and then be surprised to learn how he or she actually sounds – too high, too nasal, too fast, too southern, not southern enough. Chances are it's been a long time since anyone had that experience with Roger Ebert. For all the appeal of the "clear, plain-spoken, Midwestern style" that film critic Ebert deployed on the page – to borrow a description used by the *New York Times*' A.O. Scott in Steve James's affectionate and thoughtful portrait – his voice may have been his most readily identifiable attribute, arguably even more so than the ever-so-powerful thumb that he wielded alongside his longtime TV partner Gene Siskel as they determined which new releases would gain their blessing and which would be named 'Dog of the Week'.

That's why it felt like such a shock to lose that voice when it was silenced with the removal of Ebert's lower jaw in 2006, a brutal skirmish in the 11-year battle with cancer that ended in 2013. Of course, Ebert himself wasn't silenced by the surgery – far from it. Indeed, a more personal and intimate voice would emerge in the voluminous array of blog entries, reviews and other writings with which he filled his final years. Material from those blogs would form the basis for the moving 2011 memoir with which James's film shares its name.

But one of the most fascinating aspects of *Life Itself* is how it becomes a catalogue of Ebert's various speaking voices as well. Along with the familiar sound of its subject in the many archival clips – which chart the critic's transformation from the skittish nerd introducing Ingmar Bergman films in his first on-camera gig in the early 1970s into the tuxedoed jetsetter hobnobbing with Robert De Niro in a Cannes report for his TV show in the 1980s or holding court at Boulder's Conference on World Affairs in the 1990s – there's the Mac-generated version of his last years, in which he refused to allow his disfigurement to prevent him from continuing his life as one of cinema's most impassioned and most public advocates. And while you may expect his voice synthesiser to be the least mellifluous, it's actually more jarring to hear the eerily Ebert-like sound of Stephen Stanton, an impressionist enlisted by James to read passages from the memoir on the film's soundtrack.

Plenty of other people get the chance to speak here too, a fact that makes James's film less of an adaptation of Ebert's memoir than an equally rich and engaging companion piece. In fact, James succeeds in going beyond the usual hagiography by devoting greater attention to thornier subjects such as Ebert's complicated dynamic with Siskel, as well as the massive and not necessarily positive impact their show had on the ways movies were received, perceived and marketed. Never before had lowly reviewers become celebrities themselves, though Siskel and Ebert's show *Sneak Previews* (and its successor *At the Movies*) was a phenomenon that seems unlikely to ever be repeated. For one thing, even the rare critic who possesses a fraction of Ebert's expertise and tenacity struggles to be heard in the crowded pack of thumb-wielders in the



Critical condition: Roger Ebert

blogosphere, a community Ebert actively fostered in the final stage of his career. For another, the show's popularity had less to do with the hosts' critical acumen than their determination to never let the other one have the last word – the result was something other than a show about films that happen to be good or bad. It functioned more like, as Richard Corliss puts it here, "a sitcom about two guys who lived in a movie theatre".

Unsurprisingly, the story of their often

rancorous partnership is the most compelling strand in James's film, though Ebert's less prickly and more generous side is duly praised by his wife Chaz and many of the filmmakers he supported (a group that includes James, whose landmark 1994 doc *Hoop Dreams* benefited greatly from Ebert's thumb). With the man's passing, American film lost not just an inimitable figure but a voice that was as forceful and distinctive as it was ubiquitous. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Zak Piper
Steve James

Garrett Basch

Based upon

the memoir *Life Itself*

by Roger Ebert

Director of

Photography

Dana Kupper

Edited by

David E. Simpson

Steve James

Music

Joshua Abrams

Location Sound

Zak Piper

©Life Itself, LLC

Production

Companies

CNN Films presents a

Kartemquin Films and

Film Rites production

in association with

KatLei Productions

A film by Steve James

Executive Producers

Martin Scorsese

Steven Zaillian

Michael W. Ferro Jr

Gordon Quinn

Justine Nagan

Kat White

Mark Mitten

Film Extracts

Bonnie and

Clyde (1967)

Beyond the Valley

of the Dolls (1970)

Viskningar och

rop/Cries and

Whispers (1972)

Rocky (1976)

Apocalypse

Now (1979)

Scarface (1983)

Crash (1996)

Last Action

Hero (1993)

Once upon a

Forest (1993)

Jurassic Park (1992)

El Norte (1983)

Gates of Heaven

(1978)

Man Push Cart

(2005)

I Will Follow (2010)

Encounters at the End

of the World (2007)

Who's That Knocking

at My Door (1968)

Raging Bull (1980)

The Color of

Money (1986)

Full Metal Jacket

(1987)

The Tree of

Life (2010)

La dolce vita (1960)

Ikiru (1952)

Sweet Smell of

Success (1957)

Belle de Jour (1967)

This Is Spinal Tap

A Rockumentary

by Martin Di

Bergi (1983)

Nashville (1975)

2001: *A Space*

Odyssey (1968)

Citizen Kane (1941)

In Colour

[L78:1]

Distributor

Dogwoof

Chicago, late 2012. Roger Ebert is admitted to hospital with a fractured hip and begins a bout of rehabilitation with the help of his wife Chaz. It is the latest in a series of health problems for the longtime 'Chicago Sun-Times' film critic and broadcaster, who lost the ability to speak or eat properly when his treatment for cancer necessitated the removal of his lower jaw in 2006. Despite the evident toll this battle has taken on him, he retains his vigour and influence as a critic, having been newly energised by his embrace of blogging and social media.

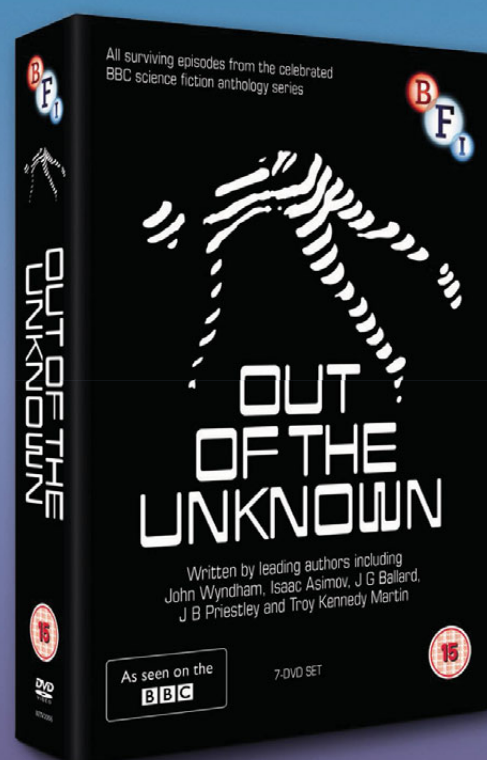
Details of Ebert's biography are interspersed with scenes of Ebert and Chaz in hospital and email conversations between Ebert and the film's director Steve James. Friends, family members, colleagues and fellow critics reflect on his career at the 'Sun-Times', his early struggle with alcoholism, his foray into screenwriting with director Russ Meyer and his accomplishments as a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer. Yet Ebert may have made his most dramatic impact on American film criticism through his role as the co-host of his television shows with Gene Siskel, with whom he enjoyed a close if often combative relationship until the latter's death in 1999. Filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese and Ramin Bahrani speak of their friendship with Ebert and their gratitude for his support.

In 2013, cancer is discovered to be the cause of Ebert's hip fracture. In his last public statement, Ebert announces "a leave of presence" due to the need for radiation treatment. On 4 April, Ebert dies at the age of 70. A week later his life is celebrated at a public memorial at the Chicago Theatre.

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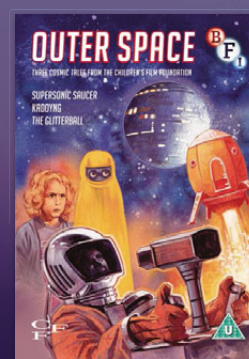
THE CHANGES
2-DVD



THE BOY FROM SPACE
2-DVD



THE DAY THE EARTH
CAUGHT FIRE
DVD



OUTER SPACE
DVD

Luna

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Dave McKean
Certificate 15 105m 53s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Dave McKean takes a 'designed and directed by' credit on his third feature after the strange half-animated children's fantasy *MirrorMask* (2005) and the Port Talbot passion play *The Gospel of Us* (2012). McKean first made his reputation as a comic-book artist, though even his most mainstream work (*Arkham Asylum*, with Grant Morrison, and *Black Orchid*, with Neil Gaiman) owes more to the collage creations of animators Jan Svankmajer or the Brothers Quay than the conventional superheroics of, say, Jack Kirby or Neal Adams.

It's plain that here he is channelling parts of his career into the characters of slightly smug, well-intentioned Dean (an illustrator who is working on children's books, though he thinks he's childless and is accused of not even liking children) and his principled but bitter and destructive art-school friend Grant (who isn't painting any more but teaches art to special-needs kids). Apart from anything else, the art we see around the isolated clifftop cottage where Dean lives with his much younger wife Freya is plainly McKean's, and the pictures and objects carefully placed in the frame have a tendency to become conduits for fantastical intrusions into what seems a mundane conversational drama.

As *Luna* begins, Grant and his wife Christine arrive to spend the weekend with Dean and Freya; they are still mourning their son Jacob, who died in infancy. The film opens with a fully animated sequence which hints that the humans here are avatars of dolls rather than the other way round, and then subtly keeps up the magic: various manifestations of Jacob (identifiable by crescent-moon tattoos) appear to various characters; grieving Christine crawls into a giant gourd to join loving but faintly disturbing figures with full- and quarter-moon heads; a sketch turns into an origami crab that comes to animated life when buried, scuttling through the last reel of the film.

An insistent, evocative score (also by McKean) imbues the film with tides of emotion not always expressed by the traditionally brittle and flip quartet of nice yet fractured middle-class creative folk under the microscope. As Freya, Stephanie Leonidas (the awkward goth teenage heroine of *MirrorMask*) is again at the centre of the pattern, though she also has the Meg Tilly-in-*The Big Chill* role of coming in late to an established set of relationships and having



Heart and craft: George Brooks

to be brought up to speed on the permutations of a complex tangle of love and resentment.

Like most animators who become live-action directors – a tradition that includes Frank Tashlin, Walerian Borowczyk and Terry Gilliam, plus Svankmajer and the Quays – McKean is as adept at shaping performances from real people as he is at making inanimate objects expressive. If Leonidas has to be elfin and affirming, except when telling a grim anecdote about the cottage's previous owner that feints towards ghost-story territory, then Michael Maloney, Ben Daniels and Dervla Kirwan have to rise to the challenge of playing people who think they've already said everything they need to say to each other (though revelations come along to order) and have settled into an uneasy friendship that flares up and dies down according to the degree of intoxication, background magic or resentment in the air at any given time. A knocked-over wine bottle spills what looks like a gout of gore as Grant goes from needling his friend about the fact that one of his paintings was found in Saddam Hussein's private collection of "dungeons and dragons shit" to simple abuse. Yet the two artists – it's suggested that Grant is the more talented, and Dean has always needed his approval – work happily together for an afternoon, creating an "exquisite corpse" collage from their sketches. Magic, in the many forms of Jacob, is healing, but so is tango, which Freya cites as the perfect embodiment of the balance she's sought and attained in her life. 🍷

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Simon Moorhead
Screenplay
Dave McKean
Story
Dave McKean
Allen Spiegel
Directors of Photography
Clive Banks
Antony Shearn
Luke Bryant
Editors
Dave McKean
Emily Rosen-Rawlings
Designed by
Dave McKean
Composers
Iain Ballamy
Dave McKean

Production Sound Mixer
Ian Sands
Costumes
Robert Lever

@Luna The Movie Ltd
Executive Producers
Clive Banks
Keith Griffiths

Cast
Ben Daniels
Grant
Dervla Kirwan
Christine
Stephanie Leonidas
Freya

Michael Maloney
Dean
Maurice Roëves
Jacob as the doctor

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Miracle Films

UK, the present. Dean, a successful illustrator, lives with his much younger partner Freya in an isolated clifftop house. Grant and Christine, who have known Dean since art school, come to spend the weekend. They are still shaken by the recent death of their infant son Jacob, though he seems to manifest in various spirit forms when needed. Dean and Grant have longstanding artistic differences, and their relationship is complicated because Dean was once involved with Christine, and paid for her to have an abortion. Christine admits to Dean that in fact the baby, a boy, was adopted, and she has recently met their now adult son. Grant has a drunken scuffle with Dean and is injured while running about the countryside; Jacob, in the form of a doctor, magically heals him. The four friends are reconciled. Freya teaches Grant to tango.

Mary Is Happy, Mary Is Happy.

Thailand/Italy/USA/United Arab Emirates 2013
Director: Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"Is it too sad? Should I delete it?", Mary Malony (Patcha Poonpiriya) asks her best friend Suri (Chonnikan Netjui) near the beginning of Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit's *Mary Is Happy, Mary Is Happy*. "But it's so pretty."

Thamrongrattanarit, like Mary, is concerned with locating and preserving the aesthetic and narrative pleasures of sadness and loss – yet the fact that the colourful bird Mary has just photographed is a dead parrot hints also at the Pythonesque absurdity Thamrongrattanarit will bring to lighten these otherwise heavy themes. In her final term of high school, Mary is on the cusp of adulthood, while also facing her first awkward, painful crushes and a possible future without Suri constantly by her side – and the pretty bird lying on the ground will soon find human analogues in fellow schoolgirls who vanish or die. *Mary Is Happy, Mary Is Happy*, is a coming-of-age story preoccupied as much with the leaving behind as with the moving forward, although in capturing his softly spoken heroine in a period of great change, Thamrongrattanarit does not shrink from surreal digressions (exploding phones, dawn peacock hunts, bakery attacks etc).

Soon Mary turns her photographic skills to producing "a yearbook to remember everyone", infused with her own quirky tastes. "I wanna do a minimalist style, with a photo book," she explains, "Spare text with beautiful photos." She will also start noting down on the backs of receipts all the puzzling, random-seeming incidents in her life, like a sort of Sibylline diary, with the express purpose of "calculating future probability". Both the yearbook and the piecemeal diary are reflexes for the structure of Thamrongrattanarit's film itself. Where his feature debut *36* (2012) confined itself to 36 headed still-frame shots, mimicking the number of exposures in a conventional 35mm film roll, the von Trier-like obstruction that he has chosen for *Mary Is Happy, Mary Is Happy* is to build his story around 410 consecutive tweets (which regularly appear in the centre of the screen) taken from a real-life Twitter user (@marylony). Choosing a set of her tweets that arbitrarily spanned the period between his being accepted for the Venice Biennale College Workshop and his proposed project being selected (in January 2013), Thamrongrattanarit uses them to extrapolate fictively, often wildly, a slice of a young woman's life – and thus offers a vivid model for the way that personal identity is both packaged and unpacked in the age of social media. This desultory, hyperbolic stream (of consciousness) may, with its violent mood swings, smell just like teen spirit – but it equally reflects the fragmentary, adolescent forms of Twitter too. Yearbooks, diaries, tweets and youth itself are all embodiments of ephemerality – yet transitory need not mean trivial, and although Thamrongrattanarit takes a mostly playful look at the melancholic vagaries of Mary's life, there is also the sense that he is capturing, on the fly, something vital and urgent about modern human experience and the multifaceted, polysemic nature of our virtual lives.

Even as these tweets are appropriated, misconstrued, reconfigured and ironised to



Tweet me right: Patcha Poonpiriya

embroider Mary's onscreen existence, she openly struggles to understand the mysterious external forces that appear to be pulling her strings. "Recently my life's been so weird, I do things without any reason," she confides to Suri, "It's like being controlled." Indeed, when her headmaster suddenly dies (everything happens suddenly in this film), his replacement brings a fascist order to the school, and Mary finds her creative control over the yearbook being wrested from her. As she muses on issues of free will and determinism, she is also articulating the tug of war between the autonomous authority of the tweets and the artificial, sometimes perverse interpretation that Thamrongrattananit's adaptation imposes on them. Thamrongrattananit

himself makes two bizarre 'divine' interventions in the film, first via a signed printout of the film's title (prompting Mary to ask, "Why me? This is freaky. Who's Nawapol?"), and second voicing the most intractable of all @marylony's tweets, "tannase is an enzyme", from the shadows of the school's basement dungeon. There is also a cameo from Jean-Luc Godard or at least a lookalike, and several references to Wong Kar-wai – even if Mary believes he directed *Life of Pie* (sic). Mary imagines her life as a movie, so why shouldn't Thamrongrattananit? *Mary Is Happy, Mary Is Happy*, delivers an offbeat yet entirely palatable feed of contradictory insights into the difficult teen years – both sad and pretty – of our new millennium. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Aditya Assarat
Written by
Nawapol
Thamrongrattananit
This film is adapted from 410 consecutive tweets of Mary Malony's Twitter stream (@marylony)
Director of Photography
Pairach Khumwan
Editor
Chonlasit Upanigkit
Production Designer
Rasiguet Sookkarn
Original Music Score
Somsiri Sangkaew
Sound Recordist
Sarawut Panta
Costume Designer
Phim U-mari

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Production Companies
La Biennale di Venezia presents

Biennale College Cinema in partnership with Gucci a Pop Pictures production with the support of MiBAC, Regione del Veneto in collaboration with IFP, 9th Dubai International Film Festival, TFL - TorinoFilmLab

Cast
Patcha Poonpiriya
Mary
Chonnikan Netjui
Suri
Vasuphon Kriangprapakit
M.
Udomporn Hongladdaporn
Kun
Rossarin Ananchanachai
Tim

Wattanapume Laisuwanchai
Asano Jr

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Day for Night

Thailand, 2012. In their final term of high school, Mary Malony and her best friend Suri embark on a project to design the school yearbook, photographing one classmate per day on the school rooftop during magic hour. A research trip to the jungle (funded by the art teacher) ends with Mary hospitalised after she accidentally ingests magic mushrooms. Mary falls in love with M., and takes a solo trip to Paris. The art teacher quits, and Mary is hospitalised again when her knock-off mobile phone explodes (not for the first time). Mary and Suri find the suicide note of missing classmate Gift in the jungle. The headmaster dies (his last words being "Mary soon"), and his replacement runs the school in a tyrannical manner. Mary starts using the backs of receipts to note down the strange things that happen to her. Already lovesick over M., Mary is unhappy that Suri may be leaving to study in Austria, and indignant that the school is curtailing her creative control over the yearbook. Sent into a tailspin of depression by Suri's sudden death, Mary is encouraged by the school doctor to repeat the mantra 'Mary is happy'. She is briefly imprisoned in the school's basement for speaking her mind about the yearbook. Finally, she leaves school and goes home to face an uncertain future.

My Old Lady

USA/United Kingdom/France 2014

Director: Israel Horovitz

Certificate 12A 106m 50s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

"Your truth, not mine," corrects Mathias (Kevin Kline), trying to make clear to the intractable Mathilde (Maggie Smith) that Max, her lover of many years, was not the man he knew. Max, recently deceased, was Mathias's father, and indifferent to a fault: "If you want to kill a kid, don't shoot him; do nothing." Mathias, an American (he prefers to go by the name of Jim), has landed in Paris to oversee the sale of the apartment he's inherited – only to find that it's a *viager* property and has been occupied for more than 40 years by English émigré Mathilde Girard. Unable to oust Mathilde and contracted to pay her a monthly sum of €2,400 until her death, Mathias realises, with muted surprise, that he's "actually inherited a debt".

Israel Horovitz's play – adapted and directed for the screen by the playwright – seems at first to be a common-or-garden comedy-drama about material inheritance, but there's more to this unassuming film than meets the eye. The same could be said of Mathias, whose character is not underwritten, as one may be tempted to think, but deliberately and brilliantly muffled, at least initially, by his all-encompassing obsession with exhuming a pecuniary runner's-up prize from the property. This is reasonable enough, given that Mathias – 57 and three times divorced – has no money in the world outside the fortune sealed within the apartment's walls, and no ticket back to America. Reasonable, except that even after he is invited to stay until he finds alternative lodgings, he unabashedly asks Mathilde's doctor about her life expectancy, and openly attempts to hawk the *viager* contract to a hotel developer with whom the Girards have feuded for generations, risking leaving Mathilde and her live-in middle-aged daughter Chloé (Kristin Scott Thomas) without a home.

Clues to the main arteries of Mathias's character are dispersed through the first half of the film but so discreetly that one wouldn't know them for breadcrumbs. His unkempt appearance, as he paces the apartment cocooned in a paisley eiderdown, begins to make emotional sense when we learn that he once tried to commit suicide, like his mother before him – though she succeeded. Mathias is a beaten man, his life the toxic fingerprint of his father's



Flat out: Maggie Smith

affair and his mother's despair. Wrapped in humour, the film is far from mawkish in its approach to inheritance – one especially funny interlude crosshatches Mathias sinking bottle after bottle of wine by the Seine with the satyric carved-stone faces of the Pont Neuf. But Mathias is right: self-esteem isn't hereditary, it's given by one's parents, and so – by the mere consciousness of its possibility – is suicide.

Horovitz's film soundly balances the interests of all three principal characters, and hides under a bushel the bloom of a love-plot that's touching in its reserve. When Chloé tells Mathias that she's past being beautiful, he returns to her later with his answer: "The perfect flower is nearly old." It's more than just a late-coming compliment – it demonstrates the hopeful potential of second attempts. Horovitz, on the other hand, needs no second time around: his directorial feature debut is an intelligent, modest film, tightly whorled – like Mathias's perfect flower. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Rachael Horovitz
Gary Foster
Nitsa Benchetrit
David C. Barrot
Written for the Screen by
Israel Horovitz
Based on his play
Director of Photography
Michel Amthieux
Editors
Jacob Craycroft
Stephanie Ahn
Production Designer
Pierre-Francois Limbosch
Music
Mark Orton
Sound Mixer
Jean-Paul Mugel
Costume Designer
Jacqueline Bouchard

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Production Companies
Cohen Media Group and BBC
Films present in association with

Protagonist Pictures and Tumbledown Productions
Limited a Cohen Media Group, Deux Chevaux/Katsize Films production in association with Krasnoff/Foster Entertainment
An Israel Horovitz film
This film benefited from the French Tax Rebate for International Production
This production participated in the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development's Post Production Credit Program
Made with the support of BBC Films
Executive Producers
Christine Langan
Joe Oppenheimer
Charles S. Cohen
Daniel Battsek
Mike Goodridge
Israel Horovitz

Raphaël Benoliel
Russ Krasnoff

Cast

Kevin Kline
Mathias Gold
Kristin Scott Thomas
Chloé Girard
Maggie Smith
Mathilde Girard
Stéphane Freiss
François Roy
Dominique Pinon
Auguste Lefebvre
Noémie Lvovsky
Dr Florence Horowitz

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Curzon Film World

France, present day. Mathias Gold is a 57-year-old American who has recently inherited his father's Paris apartment. He discovers that it is a 'viager' apartment, and 92-year-old occupant Mathilde Girard can continue to live in it until her death. Mathias is, moreover, contracted to pay Mathilde a monthly sum. Also living in the apartment is Mathilde's middle-aged daughter Chloé. Mathilde offers to let Mathias stay until he finds other lodgings. Mathias – who is penniless save for the apartment – discovers that the property is worth €12 million. Raising money for the monthly payment, he sells furnishings from the apartment. He attempts to sell on the 'viager' contract to hotel developer François Roy, with whom the Girards have a longstanding feud. Mathias learns that Mathilde and his father Max had a long love affair. Chloé tells Mathias that she found out about the affair when she was ten; Mathias reveals to Chloé that he witnessed his mother's suicide. Chloé invites Mathias to stay indefinitely. He gives her his notebook of collected thoughts on their corresponding upbringings, and they kiss.

The Necessary Death of Charlie Countryman

USA 2013

Director: Fredrik Bond

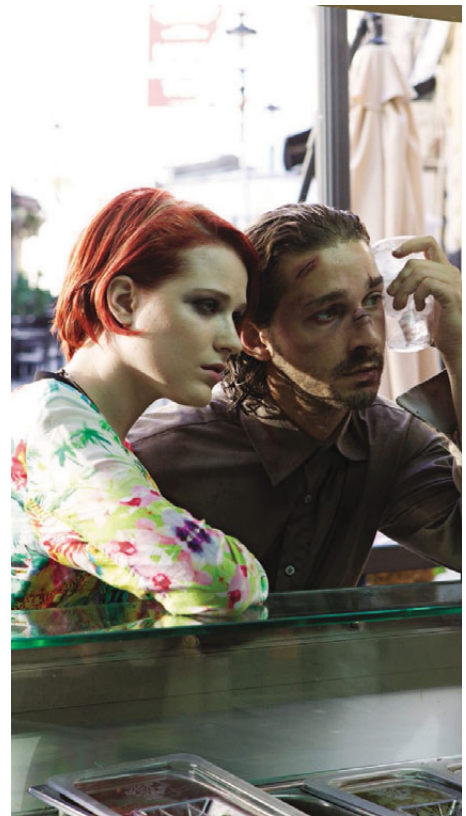
Certificate 15 103m 13s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

The ungainly title of this dismal debut feature from commercials director Fredrik Bond at least addresses the fact that its titular hero is someone audiences might not mind seeing knocked off. An alternate moniker might have been *An Idiot Abroad*. As played by the singularly uninspiring Shia LaBeouf, Charlie is a singularly uninteresting protagonist – a stringy Chicagoan nonentity who is advised by the spirit of his dead mother (Melissa Leo) to take a trip to Bucharest. It's portentous advice that introduces notions of fate and destiny to what otherwise might seem a typical shaggy-dog-out-of-water thriller.

En route to Romania, Charlie strikes up a conversation with a fellow airplane passenger, who promptly dies, but not before 1) commiserating over the sad history of the Chicago Cubs and 2) asking his seatmate to deliver something to his daughter, who conveniently lives in Bucharest as well. Said daughter, Gabi, is played by Evan Rachel Wood with a short haircut and a wavering accent, and Charlie immediately falls head over heels in love with her – a compromising position to be in when her husband is a glowering gangster played by Mads Mikkelsen. So Charlie keeps his distance, falling in with a couple of drug-addled hostel-surfers (Rupert Grint and James Buckley) and suffering recreational hallucinations that look suspiciously like high-end television advertisements, except with more full-frontal female nudity – proof that Bond is taking full artistic advantage of the feature-film medium.

There's more than a pinch of Guy Ritchie here, not only in the supercharged, candy-coloured visual atmosphere and laddish sense of humour, but also the strenuously eccentric tone. Everything in *Charlie Countryman* is 'weird' in a way that's less genuinely uncanny than carefully calculated. Bond directs like a visionary with blinkers on. He can compose individual shots and even string together decent sequences – there's a pretty good foot chase, for instance – but he has no real perspective on the eastern European locations (which he unimaginatively shoots like bustling hellscape) or on his characters' desires, which keep getting conveniently tweaked to



Bar association: Evan Rachel Wood, Shia LaBeouf

serve the plot. Gabi is a particularly dull archetype – the kept hottie in need of a white-knight rescuer – while Charlie only seems to heed the call of adventure because the film needs him to.

It's witty, perhaps, to cast LaBeouf as a callow guy to whom almost exclusively humiliating things happen. He's constantly being knocked out or run over, like Wile E. Coyote. But even this strategy grows boring and repetitive, partially because the actor can't even convincingly play a punching bag. The only performer who emerges with his dignity intact is Mikkelsen, who's better than his stock role and dialogue and knows it all too well. Pouting, posing and snarling, he's having a good time. He's the only one. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Albert Berger
Ron Yerxa
Craig J. Flores
William Horberg
Written by
Matt Drake
Director of Photography
Roman Vasyanov
Editor
Hughes Winborne
Production Designer
Joel Collins
Music
Christophe Beck
Deadmono
Sound Mixer
Dragos Stanomir
Costume Designer
Jennifer Johnson

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Production

Companies

Voltage Pictures and Picture Perfect Corporation present in association with Soundford Limited a Voltage Films/Bona Fide production
Executive Producers
Nicolas Chartier
Patrick Newall
Dean Parisot

Cast

Shia LaBeouf
Charlie Countryman
Evan Rachel Wood
Gabi Ibanescu
Mads Mikkelsen
Nigel
Til Schweiger
Darko
Rupert Grint
Karl

James Buckley

Luc
Vincent D'Onofrio
Bill
Melissa Leo
Katie
John Hurt
narrator
Ion Caramitru
Victor Ibanescu
Andrei Finti
Bela
Vanessa Kirby
Felicity

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

Chicago, the present. Charlie Countryman goes to the hospital to be with his mother as she dies; afterwards, she appears to him as a spirit and suggests that he take a trip to Bucharest. On the plane, he meets an old man, Victor, who says that he has a daughter in Bucharest; he asks Charlie to deliver a gift to her, and dies before the plane lands. In Bucharest, Charlie finds Victor's daughter Gabi, who is a cellist, and meets her husband Nigel, a gangster. Charlie hangs out with other young men at his hostel and strikes up a courtship with Gabi, who warns him that Nigel is dangerous, and that her father had planned to blackmail him with an incriminating videotape. Nigel has Charlie beaten up and arrested, but Charlie eludes the police. Gabi rejects Charlie and leaves in a car with Nigel; Charlie, inspired by another conversation with his dead mother, gives pursuit and fights Nigel, but loses. Nigel is about to shoot him when Gabi volunteers to do it and deliberately only wounds him slightly; Charlie plummets into a lake. Nigel is killed by the police. Charlie resurfaces, alive and well. He and Gabi are reunited.

Night Train to Lisbon

Germany/Switzerland/Portugal/USA 2012

Director: Bille August

Certificate 12A 111m 6s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

At the beginning of *Night Train to Lisbon*, literature professor Raimund Gregorius (Jeremy Irons) has nothing better to do than stay at home and play with himself: the game is chess, but a shot of his empty bed suggests no shared sex life to speak of. Enter a beautiful young woman in a red coat, rain-drenched and suicidal. It's an arrival right out of a classic noir, and this ominously romantic opening – a meet-cute on a bridge in Bern, Switzerland, with life and death hanging in the balance – combined with the cloak-and-dagger intimations of the title, indicates that Bille August's film might be great fun.

It isn't. Dutifully adapted from a novel by Swiss author Pascal Mercier and directed by August in the sort of stately, wan manner earned by two long-ago Palmes d'Or, *Night Train to Lisbon* is a thriller without a pulse. After saving the mystery woman's life by grabbing her bodily and dragging her to one of his classes, Raimund loses track of her; helpfully, his lecture for the day is on Marcus Aurelius and his dictum that "a man of thought is also a man of action", so he has a good excuse to pursue her. This means leafing through the book she was carrying – written by a famed Portuguese doctor and revolutionary – and using the train ticket hidden therein to hop a lift to Lisbon, where he hopes to find the lady.

But she is a (literal) red herring: the story Raimund discovers is much older, and involves the book's author, one Amadeu de Prado, played in flashbacks by Jack Huston, who looks about as Portuguese as apple pie. Predictably, while sussing out Amadeu's role in the resistance movement against the Salazar dictatorship in the late 1960s (the terrors of which are rendered far too tastefully), Raimund goes through a transformative experience of his own. He obtains



Scenes from a carriage: Geddeck, Irons

new glasses from a cute local optician (a dull metaphor for renewed vision) and sharpens his sleuthing skills, interviewing as part of his investigations a parade of wizened locals played by variably accented character actors: it seems that everybody from Charlotte Rampling to Bruno Ganz to Christopher Lee couldn't resist the lure of a nice, fat, European co-production pay cheque.

The theme here is what it means to be a man of principles, and as Raimund measures himself against Amadeu – a great orator and humanist who could do everything from perform emergency throat surgery at dinner to win the heart of a girl played by the unspeakably lovely Mélanie Laurent – he comes up wanting. But it's implied that he has improved himself in the process. How wonderful for him. For the rest of us, watching Irons skulk around in between appointments with his similarly uninterested co-stars is a chore – about as rewarding as playing chess with oneself. Ⓢ

No Good Deed

USA 2014

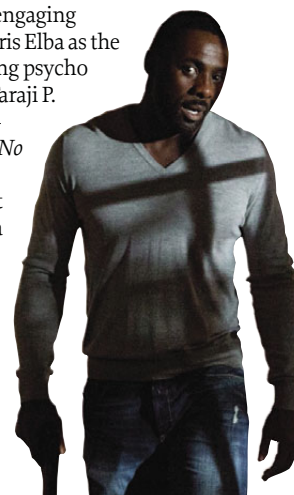
Director: Sam Miller

Certificate 15 83m 45s

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Perhaps the most notable thing about this domestic-violence-themed thriller is that its US release coincided with the emergence of CCTV footage depicting NFL superstar Ray Rice knocking his fiancée out cold and dragging her from an elevator. Concerned pundits fretted that such a confluence might harm the film's chances but they needn't have worried: *No Good Deed* cleaned up at the US box office, opening at number one.

So what seduced the audience? It can't have been the cockamamie, coincidence-strewn plotting (prison escapee uses his real name?) or ultra-dubious gender politics (the hunky, virulent misogynist is consistently framed and shot like a topless model), but rather the steady stream of competently directed, heart-in-mouth moments and the engaging performances of Idris Elba as the charming, glowering psycho and the excellent Taraji P. Henson as his ever-resourceful target. *No Good Deed* may be terminally silly but at least it presents a genuine heroine instead of the all too familiar trope of the damsel in distress who's reliant on male support. Ⓢ



Idris Elba

Credits and Synopsis

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Peter Reichenbach
Günther Russ
Kerstin Ramcke

Screenplay

Greg Latter
Ulrich Herrmann
Based on the novel by Pascal Mercier

Director of Photography

Filip Zumbunn
Editor

Hansjörg Weissbrich

Production Design

Augusto Mayer

Composer

Annette Focks

Sound Mixer

Raoul Grass

Costume Design

Monika Jacobs

©Studio Hamburg
FilmProduktion
GmbH, C-Films AG,
C-Films Deutschland
GmbH, Cinemate SA

Production Companies

K5 International
presents in
association with K5
Film and PalmStar

Media Capital

a production of

Studio Hamburg

FilmProduktion

GmbH and C-Films AG

in co-production with

Cinemate SA, C-Films

(Deutschland)

GmbH, TMG – Tele

München Group

A Bille August film

In collaboration with

ZDF, Swiss Television

SRF, Teleclub

Supported by

Eurimages,

Filmförderung

Hamburg-Schleswig

Holstein, FFA, DFFF,

Medienboard Berlin

Brandenburg,

Bundesamt für

Kultur BAK, ICA,

Zürcher Filmstiftung

Media Development/

Slate Funding: i2i

Audiovisuel, Turismo

de Portugal, Turismo

de Lisboa, Camera

Municipal de Lisboa,

K5 International,

PalmStar Media

Capital, TMG

Executive Producers

Oliver Simon

Daniel Baur

Kevin Frakes

Eric Fischer

Cast

Jeremy Irons

Raimund Gregorius,

'Mundus'

Mélanie Laurent

young Estefania

Jack Huston

Amadeu Inácio de

Almeida Prado

Martina Geddeck

Mariana de Eca

Tom Courtenay

older João Eca

August Diehl

young Jorge O'Kelly

Bruno Ganz

older Jorge O'Kelly

Lena Olin

older Estefania

Beatriz Batarda

young Adriana

Marco D'Almeida

young João

Christopher Lee

Father Bartholomeu

Charlotte Rampling

older Adriana

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[L85:1]

Distributor

Bull Dog Film

Distributors

Produced by

Lee Clay

Will Packer

Written by

Aimee Lagos

Director of Photography

Michael Barrett

Editors

Jim Page

Randy Bricker

Production Designer

Chris Cornwell

Music

Paul Haslinger

Production Mixer

Mary H. Ellis

Costume Designer

Keith G. Lewis

©Screen Gems, Inc.

Production Companies

Screen Gems

presents a Will

Packer Productions

production

Executive Producers

Aimee Lagos

Ellen Goldsmith-Vein

Lindsay Williams

Idris Elba

Taraji P. Henson

Rob Hardy

Glenn S. Gainor

Cast

Idris Elba

Colin Evans

Taraji P. Henson

Terri

Leslie Bibb

Meg

Kate Del Castillo

Alexis

Henry Simmons

Jeffrey

Mirage Spann

Ryan

Kenry Alfonso

Javier

Dolby Digital/ Datasat

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Sony Pictures

Releasing

Bern, the present. Professor Raimund Gregorius sees a young woman about to throw herself off a bridge and stops her. She runs away, leaving behind her coat and a book by a Portuguese writer; inside the book is a train ticket to Lisbon. Raimund decides to use the ticket and reads the book while en route to Lisbon; on his arrival, he goes looking for the author, Amadeu de Prado, but discovers that he died in the 1970s. Raimund is hit by a cyclist and smashes his glasses, which leads him to an optician named Mariana, whose uncle knew Amadeu when young. Amadeu was a brilliant student and doctor in the late 1960s, during the Salazar dictatorship; by treating one of the government's most violent henchmen, a man known

as the Butcher of Salazar, he incurred the wrath of his community. After being recruited into the resistance by his friend Jorge, Amadeu became attracted to Jorge's girlfriend Estefania, who had memorised key names and addresses of government officials. Out of a mixture of jealousy and paranoia, Jorge tried to kill Estefania but Amadeu saved her and smuggled her out to Spain.

Raimund goes to Spain to meet Estefania, and also meets up with the young woman from the bridge, who is the Butcher of Salazar's granddaughter. She expresses her guilt over her heritage but says that she has come to terms with it. Raimund decides to return home, but Mariana goes to the train station and suggests that he should stay in Lisbon.

Tennessee, present day. After failing to gain parole, prisoner Colin Evans escapes. He visits his ex-girlfriend Alexis in Atlanta and kills her because she is in a relationship with another man. He crashes his car and tricks his way into the house of Terri, a housewife whose husband Jeffrey is out of town. There's a spark of attraction between the pair, which is interrupted by the arrival of Terri's friend Meg, who is suspicious of Colin. Colin kills Meg and then turns on Terri. He overpowers her and drives her to the house where he killed Alexis. Colin reveals that Alexis was having an affair with Jeffrey. Jeffrey calls Alexis's phone, which Terri answers; furious, she tells Jeffrey to call the police. After a chase, Terri kills Colin. The police and Jeffrey arrive. Terri moves into a new house, without Jeffrey.

The November Man

USA 2014

Director: Roger Donaldson

Certificate 15 107m 55s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

"The front line has moved to Belgrade," CIA chief John Hanley (Bill Smitrovich) tells former agent Peter Devereaux (Pierce Brosnan) – which probably isn't true as far as contemporary espionage goes but serves as some kind of cover for this budget-conscious thriller's taking place in Serbia and Montenegro. A very familiar kind of spy film, *The November Man* forces Devereaux back into action to uncover the truth about unmistakably Putin-esque Russian presidential candidate Arkady Federov (Lazar Ristovski). Eluding a predictably indomitable female Russian assassin (she does ballet stretches to prep for shootings) and the CIA's own meddling, Devereaux gets to the bottom of things while trying to avenge the death of his ex-wife Natalia.

Brosnan is nastily brutal and contemptuously efficacious, arguably more Bond-like than his own Bond, and there's a goofily commendable commitment to destroying as many cheap vehicles as possible in the opening chase, with such affordable excess reaching self-parodying heights when a car ploughs into a truck that is (naturally) conveying a piece of glass for extra shattering impact.

A veteran hand at making do with inferior material, director Roger Donaldson keeps events moving briskly enough, making solid use of overhead drones to enable bird's-eye views of said car chase – about the only technological indication that this wasn't made 20 years ago. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Beau St Clair
Sriram Das
Screenplay
Michael Finch
Karl Gajdusek
Based on the book
There Are No Spies
by Bill Granger
Director of Photography
Romain Lacourbas
Editor
John Gilbert

Production

Designer
Kevin Kavanaugh
Music
Marco Beltrami
Sound Mixer
Stéphane Bucher
Costume Designer
Bojana Nikitovic

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Production

Companies
Relativity Media
presents an Irish
DreamTime and SPD
Films production

in association
with The Solution
Entertainment
Group, PalmStar
Media Capital
and Merced
Media Partners
A Roger
Donaldson film

Executive

Producers
Kevin Frakes
Pierce Brosnan
Lisa Wilson
Myles Nestel
Raj Brinder Singh
Stuart Brown
Mike Sullivan
Ryan Kavanaugh
Tucker Tooley
D. Constantine Conte
Kevan Van
Thompson
Alan Pao
Corey Large
Ankur Rungta
Vishal Rungta
Scott Fischer
Remington Chase
Grant Cramer
Stepan Martirosyan

Cast

Pierce Brosnan
Peter Devereaux
Luke Bracey
David Mason
Olga Kurylenko
Alice Fournier
Eliza Taylor
Sarah
Caterina Scorsone
Celia
Bill Smitrovich
John Hanley
William Patton
Perry Weinstein
Lazar Ristovski
Arkady Federov
Mediha Musliovic
Natalia Ulanova
Nina Mrda
Mira Filipova
(15 years)

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista
International (UK)

Six years after leaving the CIA, Peter Devereaux is recruited by former boss John Hanley to get agent Natalia Ulanova – Peter's ex-wife – out of Russia, where she has been working undercover, posing as an aide to presidential candidate Arkady Federov. After Natalia is killed by a CIA team led by his former partner, Peter travels to Belgrade to find Mira Filipova, whom Natalia had identified as important. Eluding both the CIA and Federov's assassin, Peter discovers that Hanley and Federov have been conspiring to start a Russian war against Chechnya. Leaving Hanley to the authorities, Peter flees with Mira to start a new life.

The Possibilities Are Endless

United Kingdom 2014

Directors: Edward Lovelace, James Hall

Certificate 12A 83m 26s



Melody maker: Edwyn Collins

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Did the projector bulb just go pop? Moments after we see archive US TV footage of Edwyn Collins performing live and effortlessly charming late-night network host Conan O'Brien, the screen turns such a Stygian blank that one suspects a major technical meltdown. When images of the cosmos emerge from the darkness, however, it turns out that this is just one of the distinctive stylistic choices making James Hall and Edward Lovelace's portrait of Collins a highly unusual item among the otherwise familiar contours of music documentaries.

While the film in due course observes its subject at home and in the studio, that opening moment of sensory dropout highlights its atypical attempt to render the interior experience of an artist who is best known these days for his

heroic recovery from a serious stroke in 2005. The aforementioned audiovisual caesura offers a fairly straightforward representation of the moment when a cerebral haemorrhage changed Collins's life for ever, but the lengthy sequence which follows, strikingly conceived and assembled, keenly portrays the primal swirl of memory that assailed Collins while he lay in a coma afterwards. Foremost in his mind looms the Scottish coastal community of Helmsdale, scene of many a childhood highland holiday, here evoked in a mood of emotionally charged recollection that's more Terence Davies than Alex Gibney. The montage is underlaid by voiceover from Collins and his wife Grace Maxwell filling in the details of his fight for life, yet the abiding impression is definitely more reverie than reportage.

Most unexpectedly, it's a fair while



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Thomas Benski
Lucas Ochoa
Julia Nottingham
Director of Photography
Richard Stewart

Editor
David Charap
Music & Original Score
Edwyn Collins
Carwyn Ellis
Sebastian Lewsley

Supervising Sound Editor/ Sound Designer
Christopher Barnett

©Pulse Films
SPV3 Limited

Production Companies
Pulse Films presents
in association with
Britdoc Circle and
Ingenious Media
Executive Producers

Beadie Finzi
Maxyne Franklin
Jess Search
Sam Sniderman
Lucy Cohen
Dolby Digital

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Pulse Films

This documentary portrait of Edwyn Collins shows the former Orange Juice frontman and solo artist recovering from the serious cerebral haemorrhage he suffered in 2005. After coming out of a coma, Collins had restricted movement on his right side, and brain damage seriously affected his memory and powers of speech. As he rediscovers his sense of self, the only phrases he can form are "Grace Maxwell", the name of his wife, and "the possibilities are endless".

His recovery brings potent recollections of childhood holidays in Helmsdale in Scotland (where he and Grace have a second home), and a

realisation of the fundamental place that music-making has in his life. Although his speech remains slightly faltering, his singing voice proves as strong as ever, and a return to his studios prompts new recordings; live performances follow.

Interwoven among this observational material is footage of a young man whose formative experiences of romance and music seem to mirror Collins's own early inspirations; he is later revealed to be Edwyn and Grace's son Will.

Edwyn and Grace contemplate a move from London to Helmsdale, facing the future in a positive light.

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before we even see the post-haemorrhage Collins, just about able to reflect on reconstructing his sense of self during his ongoing recuperation. He was stricken by aphasia, and the handful of words he could initially shape included his wife's name and the key phrase "the possibilities are endless" – which, Grace recalls in loving yet jaundiced tones, lost its idealistic lustre after she'd heard it 80 times a day. After more than three decades together, they're quite a double act, these two, and while Hall and Lovelace's film impresses for its formal endeavour, its judiciously restrained observational coverage also leaves us moved – by Collins's passionate determination not to relinquish the music-making that's always defined him, and by the life-affirming mutual devotion that has sustained husband and wife through thick and thin. Playing live, for instance, she strums the guitar while he picks out the chords with his working left hand – and there can surely be few rock docs where the undoubted highlight is the missus affectionately clipping the star's fingernails.

As we see the older, greyer, rounder Edwyn shuffling along with his gammy right foot, in marked contrast to the dashing figure he cut in his 1980s pomp, when his band Orange Juice admirably reconciled indie cool with insouciant fun, there's a total absence of vanity on display. This signals an obvious level of trust on Collins's part, and the filmmakers repay that trust by never cheapening what he and Grace have been through or overplaying it for blatant button-pushing effect. The film's directorial finesse and imagination bring insight to an already affecting true story, primarily because Hall and Lovelace are more interested in the universal resonance of finding peace through self-acceptance than in foregrounding the terrifying specifics of Collins's medical travails. Their approach isn't as thoroughly journalistic as that of the exemplary *Jason Becker: Not Dead Yet* (2012), for instance, and those with only a vague notion of Collins's pop pedigree might find the film slightly light on biographical ballast, but it's really refreshing to see relatively new filmmakers (the duo's only previous directorial credit being a low-profile US indie music survey, *Werewolves Across America*) shaping the doc form with a confidence born of a deep faith in their material.

From the Helmsdale evocation in the opening reel, where thumbnail sketches of a seagoing fisherman and his patient spouse cannily foreshadow the dynamic of the central couple, to a subsequent strand tracing the formative influence of music and romance on a young man today (his identity is a delightful reveal), the film transcends any narrow observational remit, its resonant images and telling metaphors making the end result so much richer. In Collins we find someone who spent the earlier part of his career chasing and eventually bagging that elusive hit single, yet his seeming ill fortune brings a kind of serenity – he is at ease with himself and hence 'home again', as the signature song of his later years makes clear. Leaving Edwyn and Grace under clear skies on Helmsdale beach, the film fades out on an exquisite grace note, drawing this chapter to a close, yet hearteningly suggesting so much more to come. ☺

The Remaining

USA 2014
Director: Casey La Scala
Certificate 15 88m 12s

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópidio

According to Casey La Scala's horror film *The Remaining*, the dramatic unfolding of the Rapture (as foretold by biblical prophecies) will cause all true believers to be unceremoniously removed to heaven after experiencing sudden death, leaving everyone else in a degenerated hell on earth, facing a severe test of their faith and a reckoning of their lives. It all starts with protagonists Skylar and Dan tying the knot in a hotel instead of a church. Stylistically and thematically, *Left Behind*, *Cloverfield* and *Paranormal Activity* – and an opening sequence that recalls *[REC] 3: Genesis* – all loom large, as La Scala (best known for producing *Donnie Darko*) presses fast-forward on his characters' desperate search for salvation and redemption.

There's no ambiguity, double-meaning or 'doubt' here, no wondering if the events are actual or the projection of troubled minds. It's all simply a question of faith, with La Scala sticking doggedly to the most straightforward reading of events and making a small-budget disaster film/supernatural thriller that proceeds by shocks and jolts rather than what originally seemed a well-intentioned if simplistic spiritual search. ☹



Revelations: Johnny Pacar, Liz E. Morgan

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Brad Luff
Marc Bienstock
Casey La Scala
Screenplay
Casey La Scala
Chris Dowling
Story
Casey La Scala
Director of Photography
Doug Emmett
Editor
Paul Covington
Production Designer
Brian Stultz
Music
Nathan Whitehead
Sound Mixer
Jonathan Gaynor

Costume Designer
Carol Cutshall
©Affirm Films Production Companies
Affirm Films presents a Cinematic production in association with Sunrise Pictures and Baron Films
A Casey La Scala film
Executive Producer
Peter Schafer

Cast
Alexa Vega
Skylar
Shaun Sips

Jack
Johnny Pacar
Tommy
Italia Ricci
Allison
Bryan Dechart
Dan
Liz E. Morgan
Sam
John Pyper-Ferguson
Pastor Shay

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Miracle Communications

US, the present. Lapsed Catholics Skylar and Dan are getting married in a hotel when people around them suddenly start dropping dead. With their close friends, Skylar and Dan escape from a series of Judgement Day occurrences. They seek shelter in a church, where the priest tells them that believers in God have been taken up to heaven, an event known in the Bible as the Rapture; everyone else is left behind in a hellish version of earth. The priest – who has regained his faith – tries to save them but he dies. One by one, Skylar, Dan and their friends recover their faith, only to each die a violent death: in the wake of the Rapture, demons are attempting to exterminate all trace of faith from the earth.

The Rewrite

USA 2014
Director: Marc Lawrence

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

Writer/director Marc Lawrence has become a veritable Hugh Grant moviemaking machine – he and the actor have done *Two Weeks Notice* (2002), *Music and Lyrics* (2007) and *Did You Hear About the Morgans?* (2009) together. Now, in their fourth outing, Grant plays a version of Lawrence himself – a screenwriter who's unable to replicate an early success and who reluctantly takes a job, at the behest of his agent, as a creative-writing tutor at a drab East Coast college very far from sunny Hollywood. Grant's Keith Michaels arrives there with a sense of desolation – and immediately jeopardises his position by sleeping with a future student, whom he picks up in a Wendy's hamburger joint.

Academic life is fairly well represented, with an amusing caricature from *The West Wing's* Allison Janney as Mary Weldon, a spinster of a certain age and type, a votary at the shrine of Jane Austen. Luckily, Keith also meets feisty and much more 'appropriate' love interest Holly (Marisa Tomei), a mature student who encourages him to be more positive and to reach out to his estranged 18-year-old son. But Mary has it in for him and seems set on ensuring that he's sacked for sexual misconduct and for being, well, just rather annoying.

Lawrence has done very little to conceal the quite obviously autobiographical nature of his film – indeed, he's even set it in Binghamton University, where he himself taught creative writing and where he was a student (though this part is not in *The Rewrite*), graduating in 1981. He is best known for writing *Miss Congeniality* (2000), which is perhaps translated here into Keith's fictional hit *Paradise Misplaced* – Keith is plagued by glowing references to it by everyone from movie executives to airport security guards.

Keith feels a failure, washed up, coasting on past triumphs; it's a job description that Grant must by now have on his business card, the kind of role he's rather good at. But unlike many Grant movies of recent years – and yes, this is a caramel-centred redemption story – there are some interesting points raised along the way, most specifically about whether or not art can be taught. Grant's story arc means that he changes his mind on the matter and this somehow makes him a better person. He



Scene it all: Hugh Grant

Say When

USA 2014
Director: Lynn Shelton
Certificate 15 99m 15s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Like her last film but one – the fun and touching *Your Sister's Sister* (2011) – director Lynn Shelton's sixth feature is set in her hometown of Seattle and is, again, about putting the brakes on life to get some needed perspective. In the former, the withdrawal of Mark Duplass's Jack to an island retreat is complicated by the arrival of its lender-sisters and an accidental love triangle; in *Say When*, it's the sisterly relationship formed between two strangers that provides the protagonist with the way out she's been wanting.

Megan (Keira Knightley), in her late twenties, is educated to post-degree level and lives with her long-term boyfriend Anthony; she responds to his pressure to take a personality test with flighty insouciance: "The type that I am is a procrastinator." Dodging career counselling, she's content to be doing odd jobs for her doting, enabler dad, and it's not until Anthony proposes that she concedes she should consider her future. But when she meets the underage Annika at a bargain grocery store and agrees to buy alcohol for her, Megan asks a favour in return: can she lay low at Annika's house for a week, no questions asked?

Say When (released as *Laggies* in the US) isn't the typical commitment-phobe drama, because Megan doesn't act like a typical person – as Annika's single father Craig (Sam Rockwell) is quick to point out. A grown woman hanging out with a pubescent kid is odd however you look at it, but as someone who knows firsthand how time can pass by undetected – he divides his own life into "best gorgeousness" (senior year), "taffeta" (a wedding) and "then there was a kid" – Craig is sympathetic.

The film's conceit is a solid one: there is an umbilical connection between marriage proposal and forward projections made in high school. Annika's first crush and Megan's engagement are corresponding markers, and there's not much to tell the girls apart in terms of temperament. Megan easily slips back into the teenage mindset, piercing ears at a party, happy to hang around in pyjamas, which she covers



Time's arrow: Keira Knightley

with only a coat to go drinking with Craig at a Mexican restaurant. There is no instruction manual for living through one's twenties, and Megan embodies the personality put to sleep by the surprising non-eventfulness of those billed-as-crucial years, the transition between adolescence and adulthood, which can feel not at all like change but stagnation, torpor, entropy.

Knightley's earlier performances have been vexed by what appeared to be a nervous disposition. Perhaps a by-product of the roles she was offered in younger years, she has had a tendency to look both self-satisfied and pained – an off-putting mix. Here, however, she manages to set aside that trademark tightness, possibly because she's working with a female director, herself an actor. In the period-costume parts that she's steadily pulling away from, Knightley has been constricted to meet very clear character beats, but *Say When*'s more equivocal emotional trajectory gives her her breath back. Shelton's two-camera coverage suits her. The script by first-timer Andrea Seigel is ungainly in places, and Shelton countersigns its pat lessons. "Suck it up and go with your gut" sounds prosaic for a sign-off resolution but – to give the film its due – this is how people speak. ☺

is unexpectedly delighted and recharged by the business of teaching the young; indeed, it is this central realisation that allows even the curmudgeonly Mary to forgive his (quite serious) trespass. It's not a story about a failed writer: *The Rewrite* is a love letter to teaching.

'I like being a teacher,' Grant's character says at an early stage in the film where he's already slept with a student, a grubby business, and it's kind of funny for a while, and then becomes rather reprehensible. When selecting his students from a pile of their scripts, he doesn't bother to read their work, he simply goes on the campus website and selects the girls he finds attractive and a couple of token ugly boys. As it happens both these boys perform key functions in his development from Hollywood cad to refined soul; one kid, obsessed with *Star Wars*, takes his advice about broadening his horizons and gets into such serious trouble he's hospitalised. Another male student comes up with such a good script he gives it to his own agent to sell, and selflessly chaperones him to a meeting of the very studio sharks who have been turning him down for years. What he discovers is that words have consequences, an odd lesson, you would have thought, for a professional writer to learn, but learn it he does. He learns to regret his glibness and slickness, his Hollywood patter, and so finds absolution.

Some of Grant's lines are really quite good, zingy and seemingly spontaneous. There are serious moves afoot to rehabilitate Grant as an actor, and his turn here, narcissistic and self-pitying and yet at the same time lively and winning, is not a bad place to start. ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Liz Glotzer Martin Shafer	Companies A Castle Rock Entertainment, Reserve Room Productions production With the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development	Marisa Tomei Holly Carpenter Bella Heathcote Karen Gabney J.K. Simmons Dr Hal Lerner Chris Elliott Professor Jim Harper Allison Janney Professor Mary Weldon
Written by Marc Lawrence	Executive Producer David Koplan	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Director of Photography Jonathan Brown	Film Extracts <i>Dirty Dancing</i> (1987) <i>Marty</i> (1954) <i>12 Angry Men</i> (1956)	Distributor Lionsgate UK
Editor Ken Eluto	Cast Hugh Grant Keith Michaels	
Production Designer Ola Maslik		
Music Clyde Lawrence		
Sound Mixer Tom Nelson		
Costume Designer Gary Jones		
©Professor Productions, LLC Production		

Los Angeles, present day. Keith Michaels, a screenwriter who wrote a hit film over a decade ago, is desperately trying to sell a new script to the studios, but without success. Running out of money, he accepts a job as a teacher of creative writing at Binghamton University in Upstate New York. Before he even starts teaching, he breaks college rules by sleeping with a student. Some members of staff dislike Keith's populist approach. Keith insists that writing can't be taught, but mature student Holly disagrees with him. Unexpectedly, Keith's talent for teaching blossoms. However, he faces disciplinary action and possible dismissal because of his earlier liaison with the student. He realises that he loves teaching – and that he has fallen for Holly. He charms his way out of trouble.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Myles Nestel Kevin Frakes Raj Brinder Singh	The Solution Entertainment Group presents in association with Merced Media Partners, Palmstar Media Capital and PenLife Media A film by Lynn Shelton	Jeff Garlin Ed Ellie Kemper Allison Mark Webber Anthony Daniel Zovatto Junior
Produced by Steve Golin Alix Madigan-Yorkin Rosalie Swedlin	Executive Producers Lisa Wilson Craig Chapman Ankur Rungta Vishal Rungta Shawn Simpson Gordon Bijelonic Paul Green Jennifer Roth	In Colour [1.85:1]
Written by Andrea Seigel		Distributor Icon Film Distribution
Director of Photography Benjamin Kasulke		US theatrical title <i>Laggies</i>
Edited by Nat Sanders		
Production Designer John Lavin		
Music Benjamin Gibbard		
Production Sound Mixer Kelsey Wood		
Costume Designer Ronald Leamon		
©Laggies Fund, LLC Production Companies Anonymous Content,	CAST Keira Knightley Megan Chloë Grace Moretz Annika Sam Rockwell Craig Kaitlyn Dever Misty	

Seattle, present day. Though highly educated, 28-year-old Megan is happily purposeless. She works part-time for her adoring father and lives with high-school sweetheart Anthony. At the wedding of mutual friends, Anthony proposes. That night, Megan buys alcohol for 16-year-old Annika and gets drunk with her and her friends. When Anthony renews his proposal the next morning, Megan weakly accepts and they decide to elope to Las Vegas. Megan lies to Anthony about signing up for a personal development seminar and instead holes up at Annika's house for the week. Annika's single father Craig, a divorce lawyer, is initially disconcerted by his daughter's new friendship but he and Megan soon get along and, after a night's drinking, sleep together. Annika accepts their relationship but is angry when she discovers that Megan is engaged. When Megan is arrested for drink-driving, covering up for one of Annika's friends, Craig offers his services as a lawyer. Megan tells him the truth about Anthony and he leaves, wounded. At the airport with Anthony, Megan realises that she has fallen out of love with him and they go their separate ways. She makes up with Annika at Annika's prom, and asks Craig's forgiveness on his doorstep. He lets her in.

Serena

USA/Czech Republic 2014
Director: Susanne Bier
Certificate 15 109m 34s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Since Susanne Bier made her name with a string of stirring melodramas (including 2010's Oscar-winning *In a Better World*), she must have seemed a fine fit to bring Ron Rash's dark Depression tale of North Carolina timber tussles and empire-hungry hubris to the screen. It's a big stretch, however, from principled Danes in family crisis to the backwoods machinations and murder plots of newlyweds George and Serena Pemberton, wrestling with tainted love and the threat of a National Park buyout. Bier's film is high, wide and handsome, making misty Czech forests the uncanny double of logging-scarred Smoky Mountain hillsides. But it never finds the dramatic tone that will allow it to become the *Cold Mountain*-style period romance it's aiming for.

The chief stumbling block is the ambitious mix of elements, since the story of the Pembertons' doomed marriage and stillborn timber dynasty is a curious mixture of tragedy and romance. Its plot centres on the type of early-20th-century empire-building last seen in *There Will Be Blood*, as the central couple rapidly become the Macbeths of the Appalachian logging industry. Jennifer Lawrence's ruthless Serena, who proves equally deadly towards rattlesnakes, double-crossers and innocent toddlers, also adds a strong streak of noir menace to the proceedings.

Bier infuses this melodrama mash-up with an Old Hollywood feel, fixing Lawrence and co-star Bradley Cooper in frequent starry close-ups, as George stares manfully at the horizon or Serena's jaw clenches meaningfully. Despite the authentically 1929 costuming and design (Lawrence's seductive silk clothes signal dangerous allure among



Timber queen: Jennifer Lawrence

the forest greys and browns), there's a 1940s whiff about the film, thanks to its unabashedly 'women's noir' themes and Lawrence's Barbara Stanwyck-style toughness. Serena's determined pale-blue eyes, unhinged marital love and evil, single-focus pragmatism also bring to mind Gene Tierney's killer-wife in *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945). Equipped with a trained eagle and Rhys Ifan's dour, honour-bound assassin, Lawrence makes Serena a truly fatal femme.

She's the most accomplished feature of a film that can't find a cinematic equivalent for the spare, elliptical prose of Rash's novel. Even though Bier keeps both visuals and performances restrained, the film still clunks noticeably through its operatic narrative and Christopher Kyle's stilted, grandiose dialogue. Cooper, trying his hand at a bluff, outdoorsy performance, isn't a great fit here. His accent wanders freely either side of the Mason-Dixon line, chiming oddly with the hillbilly inflection of Toby Jones's splenetic sheriff.

Perhaps the most intriguing thing about the film is its ambivalence when pitting Nature against rugged American individualism. Bier's camera lingers on the lushly forested mountain ranges and shows the bloodsoaked human cost of the timber trade. Clean landscapes and dirty business are laboriously contrasted, as George pays off a senator and bumps off his partner. Yet his rousing rebuttal to the National Park promoters ("Freedom! That's what this country is supposed to be about!") has an almost Ayn Rand fervour, and gets an enthusiastic reception from the work-hungry townspeople.

Bier's film wants our sympathy for its grasping lovers, insisting that the death of their dynastic dream tips Serena into madness and George into self-sacrifice. Had it had the nerve to underline the fact that both Pembertons are predators – destroying land and people alike – it would have been a more vivid and satisfying piece. **S**



Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Nick Wechsler
Susanne Bier
Steve Schwartz
Paula Mae Schwartz
Todd Wagner
Ron Halpern
Ben Cosgrove

Written by

Christopher Kyle
Based on the book by Ron Rash

Director of Photography

Morten Soborg

Editors

Mat Newman
Pernille Bech
Christensen
Production Designer
Richard Bridgland

Music

Johan Soderqvist
Sound Mixer
Tomas Belohradsky
Costume Designer
Signe Sejlund

©Serena (U.S.)
Productions LLC

Production Companies

Studio Canal and
2929 Productions
present in association
with Anton Capital
Entertainment, S.C.A.

A Nick Wechsler
and Chockstone
Pictures production
A Susanne Bier film
Co-producer:

Sirena Film

Supported by the
Czech Republic
through the State
Cinematography
Fund under the
Film Incentives
Programme

Executive Producers
Peter McAleese
Mark Cuban
Olivier Courson

Cast

Bradley Cooper
George Pemberton
Jennifer Lawrence

Serena Pemberton

Rhys Ifans

Galloway

Toby Jones

Sheriff McDowell

David Dencik

Buchanan

Sean Harris

Campbell

Ana Ularu

Rachel Hermann

Sam Reid

Vaughn

Conleth Hill

Doctor Chaney

Douglas Hodge

Horace Kephart

Kim Bodnia

Abe Hermann

Christian McKay

Boston bank manager

Dolby Digital/DTS

In Colour

[]

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

North Carolina, 1929. Timber-camp owner George Pemberton brings his tough, orphaned bride Serena home after a whirlwind courtship. He discovers that his business partner Buchanan secretly sides with local interests seeking their land for a National Park. George kills him, partly in self-defence, during a bear hunt. Heavily pregnant, Serena saves the life of employee Galloway in an accident, but miscarries, and is then infertile. Galloway pledges himself to her. Foreman Campbell discovers that the company is failing. He tells the sheriff that George killed Buchanan. Galloway kills Campbell before he can testify. Serena, jealous of Jacob, the baby fathered by George with serving-girl Rachel, sends Galloway to kill mother and child, but the sheriff has relocated them. Alerted to Serena's plan, George assaults and abandons her. George confesses to Buchanan's murder to the sheriff and discovers Rachel's whereabouts. Galloway, chased by George, finds Rachel and Jacob hiding on a train leaving town. George kills Galloway during a struggle, and sends Rachel and Jacob away for safety. George wounds a panther that he had been hunting for months in the forest. It springs on him, and they die together. After seeing George's corpse, a despairing Serena sets fire to the timber camp.

Set Fire to the Stars

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Andy Goddard
Certificate 15 96m 47s

Reviewed by Anton Bittel

"Paradise!" declares Dylan Thomas (Celyn Jones) as he enters a diner in Fairfield County, Connecticut. "That's one word for it," says his more sceptical companion, John Malcolm Brinnin (Elijah Wood). Here there appears to be more than one word for everything. Waitress Rosie (Maimie McCoy) effortlessly converts customers' orders into an unintelligible stream of diner lingo ("Two chicks on a raft, wreck 'em"), yet is puzzled by Brinnin's description of himself as Thomas's "Boswell, his amanuensis" ("You must be a poet, you speak funny"), and misconstrues his assertion that Thomas is from Wales as a *Moby-Dick* reference (unaware that earlier Brinnin has been referred to as the "man to captain this ship" and "Ahab"). Yet while Thomas may be a "strange little foreign man" in a foreign land, he is keen and quick to assimilate, and is soon happily sharing a drink, hard-luck stories and *Hamlet* quotes with a stranger (Richard Brake). There is resonant poetry everywhere here for those, like Thomas, who will lend their ear. Local boy Brinnin, however, remains aloof and isolated, sitting apart and so out of tune with his own people that he fails to understand a direct proposition from Rosie to meet after work.

Very loosely expanded from the first 30 or so pages of the real Brinnin's 1955 book *Dylan Thomas in America*, and overlapping to a degree with the recent BBC drama *A Poet in New York*, *Set Fire to the Stars* is the feature debut of regular TV director Andy Goddard (who co-wrote with Jones). Set in the winter of 1950, it is a study in words and character, as Brinnin, recently granted a poetry professorship and brimming with ambition, finds himself playing "benefactor, babysitter, nursemaid" to "the purest lyrical poet in the English-speaking world" on his first tour of America – and freefalling in the orbit of an unfathomably talented wordsmith on a self-destructive binge. What follows is a clash of Apollonian and Dionysian poetics: where bookish Brinnin wishes to reduce Thomas's work to theory, labelling and analysis, for Thomas poetry comes from a surrender to the emotions (and booze), from the ambiguous slippage of words, and from an engagement with life beyond the ivory tower. Where Brinnin places marks



Burning bridges: Celyn Jones, Elijah Wood

The Skeleton Twins

USA 2014

Director: Craig Johnson

Certificate 15 92m 52s

See interview
on page 10

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Writer-director Craig Johnson's second feature, about a sibling friendship gone to seed, has much in common with Kenneth Lonergan's *You Can Count on Me* (2000). Lonergan's drama, starring Laura Linney and a fresh-faced Mark Ruffalo on the lip of indie fame, brought brother and sister together under one roof and observed the vicissitudes of their relationship. Poor at communicating after intervals apart and having chosen different paths in life, they lacked direction after losing their parents in childhood. Johnson's siblings Maggie (Kristen Wiig) and Milo (Bill Hader) are similarly out of the habit of closeness after ten years at opposite ends of America: Milo is a luckless actor in LA, Maggie is still in their hometown in upstate New York. Milo moves in with Maggie after trying and failing to commit suicide – an act that is hardly a fast-pass to rapprochement, since their father killed himself when they were young.

Watching Lonergan's film, one witnessed first-hand and judged for oneself the protagonists' behaviour. It felt unformulaic and surprising. But *The Skeleton Twins* is all ricochet, the events (or non-events) of Johnson's script the upshot of *a priori* actions and established patterns of conduct: drinking, concealment, depression. Maggie and Milo's father's death, the formative love affair between a 15-year-old Milo and his college teacher Rich, the prologue to his attempted suicide – all this is off screen and inferential. Milo's onscreen peregrination from morbid to more positive thinking is conversion by conversation, like therapy – and the same is true of the truce he reaches with his stymied, life-shy sister.

Given that it's the talk that does all the talking, it's some reassurance that Johnson's dialogue – padded with ad libbing by Hader and Wiig, who are improvisational royalty, wet-nursed at the breast of *Saturday Night Live* – is credible and interesting. Hader is superb as the gay Milo, still holding a torch for Rich, their deemed-indelible affair of a decade ago determinative and unshakeable. In drag for Halloween or deadpan at a bar on 'dyke night',



Funny bone: Luke Wilson

Hader is always thoroughly believable. Regarding himself in a full-length mirror, he laments, "I have a body like a frog," managing, in his delivery, both humour and a piteous humility. The camera loves him – something that hasn't so far been visible in the Judd Apatow and Seth Rogen-scripted comedies he's frequented in minor roles since the mid-2000s. That he's only just beginning to appear in non-comedic, non-conventional films – starting with the triptych *The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby* – is mystifying and cause for excitement.

Until firmly established and trusted to engage an audience with other than horseplay, Hader will straddle the divide, as here. *The Skeleton Twins* is tonally indecisive – possibly as a result of Johnson being in thrall to his cast's comedic abilities. It's a film of close-ups and medium shots, its *mise en scène* nondescript until tailored for a lip-synching set piece, shot and lit like a music video. An enjoyable let-up it is – but it looks like the director's taking his lead from the talent rather than the other way around. Ⓢ

and critiques against his students' work, the impassioned words of a letter from Thomas's wife Caitlin conjure for him (and for us too) a living, breathing muse (Kelly Reilly) to be loved and feared. These two men of letters relate to poetry – and the world – in very different ways, yet find a common language of friendship, even if Brinnin, in his final conversation with Thomas, is uncharacteristically lost for words.

This melancholic, monochrome vision of Truman-era East Coast America has all been beautifully recreated in Wales (in furtherance of the film's themes of US-Welsh exchange). The paradise of the 'Connecticut' countryside contrasts with the New York townscapes, here rendered in stylised CGI, like a snowglobe *Sin City* (which also featured Wood). Thomas would succumb to their fatal temptations, and his own demons, in 1953 – but *Set Fire to the Stars* is equally concerned with Brinnin's difficult emergence from the stuffy, gated gardens of academe into the messier reality outside. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

AJ Riach
Andy Evans

Screenplay

Andy Goddard
Celyn Jones

Director of

Photography
Chris Seager

Editor

Mike Jones

Production

Designer
Edward Thomas

Music

Gruff Rhys

Sound Mixer

Bryn Thomas

Costume Designer

Francisco
Rodriguez-Weil

©Mad As Birds
Limited

Production

Companies
The Works presents
a Mad As Birds film in
association with YJB
Films, Masnomis and

Film Cymru Wales

Supported by Film
Cymru Wales,

National Lottery
through the Arts
Council of Wales

Executive Producer

Steve Clark-Hall

Cast

Elijah Wood

John Malcolm

Brinnin

Celyn Jones

Dylan Thomas

Steven Mackintosh

Jack

Kevin Eldon

Stanley

Maimie McCoy

Rosie

Steve Speirs

Mickey

Richard Brake

Mr Unlucky

Shirley Henderson

Shirley

Kelly Reilly

Caitlin Thomas

Dolby Digital

In Black and White
[2.35:1]

Distributor

Munro Film Services

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Stephanie Langhoff
Jennifer Lee
Jacob Pechenik

Written by

Craig Johnson
Mark Heyman

Director of

Photography

Reed Morano

Editor

Jennifer Lee

Production Designer

Ola Maslik

Music

Nathan Larson

Sound Mixer

Anton Gold

Costume Designer

Kaela Wohl

©Skeleton Twins LLC

Production

Companies

A Duplass Brothers
production
A Venture Forth
production

Belladonna

Productions

This film was

supported by the

Sundance Institute

Feature Film Program

Filmed with the

support of the New

York State Governor's

Office for Motion

Picture & Television

Development

Executive Producers

Mark Duplass

Jay Duplass

Jared Ian Goldman

Cast

Bill Hader

Milo Dean

Kristen Wiig

Maggie Dean

Luke Wilson

Lance

Ty Burrell

Rich

Boyd Holbrook

Billy

Joanna Gleason

Judy

Kathleen Rose

Perkins

Carlie

Adriane Lenox

Dr Linda Essex

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Sony Pictures

Releasing

US, present day. After unsuccessfully attempting suicide, out-of-work actor Milo leaves LA and moves in with his married sister Maggie in their hometown in upstate New York. The siblings' father committed suicide when they were adolescents, and their mother subsequently moved away to Arizona. Maggie and her husband Lance are supposedly trying for a baby, but Maggie is secretly taking contraceptive pills. Milo tries to reconnect with his college teacher Rich, with whom he had a sexual liaison at 15. Maggie takes scuba-diving classes and has sex with her instructor. The siblings bond, gradually restoring their previously close and confiding relationship. Milo spends the night with Rich, who now has a teenage son and girlfriend. On Halloween, Maggie is angry to learn of Milo's rendezvous with Rich – she was the person who exposed their earlier relationship, causing Rich to lose his job. Milo tips off Lance about Maggie's use of contraceptives; the siblings argue viciously when Maggie finds out. Milo leaves New York. Later, intuiting Maggie's intentions from a voicemail, he returns to rescue her from suicide by drowning. The two make up and buy goldfish for Milo.

New York, 1950. Sponsored by his colleague Jack, young, newly appointed professor of poetry John Malcolm Brinnin receives a grant to bring over his hero Dylan Thomas on his first reading tour of America. He is warned that a failure to keep the Welsh poet's notorious rabble-raising under control will cost him his career. When the already ailing Thomas proves unable to resist the temptations of New York's bars and parties, Brinnin drives him to his family's riverside cabin in Connecticut to recover before a crucial appearance at Jack's alma mater, Yale. Thomas gradually befriends Brinnin as they share experiences and discuss poetry. Married neighbours (and writers) Shirley and Stanley come over for a night of boxing, storytelling and adultery. On the eve of his Yale appearance, Thomas drinks himself into a stupor – and then, after a decent recital, insults the senior academics over dinner. Jack informs Brinnin that his professorship is over. Feeling betrayed, Brinnin insists that Thomas finally read the letter from his wife Caitlin that he has thus far studiously left unopened (and tried several times to lose). Galvanised by the impassioned letter, Thomas completes the tour with renewed vigour so that he can return home to his family.

Stations of the Cross

Germany/France 2014

Director: Dietrich Brüggemann

See Feature
on page 44

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

"Can you like both rock and Bach chorales?" For the 14-year-old protagonist of *Stations of the Cross*, this is a solemn question, and one to which she sincerely seeks an answer. Since she loves her mother and believes in God, Maria (Lea van Acken) wants to emulate her mother's unbending commitment to their church. Possessed, however, of the unclouded logic of a child, she finds it hard to accept that so many others, among them her music-loving schoolmate Christian, can be living steeped in sin; or that her own yearnings, including her wish to be close to Christian, are inherently sinful. It takes a longer lifetime of self-indoctrination, like that of her mother (Franziska Weisz), to think that way, and some harsh or evasive reasoning to defend it. "God's ways are inscrutable," says Maria's priest, Father Weber, when – evidently thinking of her developmentally challenged brother Johannes – she asks why a child would be punished with illness.

Taking Father Weber's teachings on self-sacrifice for others absolutely literally, Maria undertakes to sacrifice herself for her brother: she stops eating in exchange for his beginning to speak. This course of action is, on one level, a sincere and pious act of sacrifice. It is also a dare to God to drop the inscrutability and provide a clear sign; an experiment in shifting her religious knowledge from the theoretical to the visceral. It is a desperate act of love for her mother, who cannot be content as long as Johannes's condition endures. And it is a reaction to the same earthly pressures that drive countless people into eating disorders and other forms of self-mutilation: the pressure of others' judgements, the awareness of one's own shortcomings, the fear of failure. Maria begins her regime of self-starvation after Father Weber observes her reaching for a cookie after class and says, "I see a potential sacrifice there."

Dietrich Brüggemann's film, co-written with his sister Anna Brüggemann, is keen in its observation of the way that teenagers, and perhaps teenage girls in particular, bear the weight of the perceptions and projections of others. It's apparent that Maria's mother's barely restrained rage against her daughter has more to do with her own regrets and frustrations than with anything Maria does; and that Father Weber's excessive interest in Maria and her nascent sexual desires may reveal something about the origins of his own investment in self-punishment. Like Jesus, Maria symbolically carries things for others, simply by existing.

However, if – as one might glean from its tone and presentation – the film intends to protest against this undue burdening of an innocent, it arguably creates something of a logic problem for itself by having Maria's sacrifice *work*. Maria dies, Johannes speaks – so the sect is right, and self-sacrifice is effective. But she dies by choking on a communion wafer, so the sect is wrong and self-sacrifice is a preposterous, dangerous notion! Or, either point of view is laughable, a massive coincidence has just occurred, and we're supposed to snicker at the demise of a child...

At this point, a film thus far distinguished by some subtle moments and sweet characterisations,



Peace offering: *Stations of the Cross*

and troubled mostly by a heavily sketched maternal monster, becomes a pile-up of ironies that threatens to collapse into meaninglessness. With a little more cutesy dry humour, *Stations of the Cross* might resemble – with its heart-touching adolescent non-romance – something by Wes Anderson. With a bit more sardonic rage, it would seem to be imitating Lars von Trier. As it is, it feels at once too mild and too cynical: keen to flag up spiritual possibilities in the manner of, say, *Ordet* (1955), but too mean and hip to fall for them itself.

Formally, it strives for and largely achieves an extreme elegance and simplicity: it is strictly divided into 14 short chapters named for the

Stations of the Cross, the scenes within them largely still shots. Its most penetrating moments are of kindness between Maria and Christian, or between Maria and the family's au pair, Bernadette; it is less effective in its portrayal of Maria's hysterically angry mother, and misses a whole seam of insights by reducing her father to an absence so utter that it requires a double take for the viewer to remember who he is each time he appears on screen. This most passive of fathers gets an unearned moment of moral outrage in a closing scene between the parents which compounds the narrow-minded implication that what has passed has been the mother's fault. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Jochen Laube
Leif Alexis
Fabian Maubach
Screenplay
Dietrich Brüggemann
Anna Brüggemann
Cinematography
Alexander Sass
Editor
Vincent Assmann
Production Design
Klaus-Peter Platten

Sound Recordist

Jacob Igner
Costumes
Bettina Marx

©UFA Fiction, Cine Plus, SWR, ARTE
Production Companies
Camino Filmverleih presents a UFA Fiction production in co-production with

SWR, ARTE and Cine Plus Filmproduktion GmbH supported by MFG Filmförderung Baden-Württemberg, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, Deutscher Filmförderfonds

Cast

Lea van Acken

Maria
Franziska Weisz
mother
Florian Stetter
Father Weber
Lucie Aron
Bernadette
Moritz Knapp
Christian
Michael Kamp
father
Georg Wesch
Thomas

Chiara Palmeri
Katharina
Linus Fluhr
Johannes
Birge Schade
sports teacher
Ramin Yazdani
physician
Hanns Zischler
mortician

In Colour
[L85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
Arrow Film Distributors Ltd

German theatrical title
Kreuzweg

Set in present-day Germany, the film is divided into chapters named after the 14 Stations of the Cross used within Catholic devotions to depict Jesus's route to the crucifixion.

Fourteen-year-old Maria's family belongs to a strict Catholic sect; she is soon to be confirmed. Her four-year-old brother Johannes cannot yet speak, and is thought to be autistic. At a pre-confirmation class, Maria is given instruction by her priest Father Weber on the subject of self-sacrifice. Hoping to cure Johannes, Maria begins to refuse food and warm clothing. A schoolmate, Christian, befriends her and asks her to join his church choir; Maria seeks her mother's permission, pretending that Christian is a girlfriend, but her mother is infuriated at the prospect. Maria goes to confession with Father Weber, and resolves to avoid

the choir and friendship with Christian. She refuses to move to 'satanic' pop music during gym class at school; Christian is mocked by the other children for standing up for her. Maria, ever weaker, asks Christian to leave her alone. During her confirmation, Maria collapses. After a standoff with her mother, the family doctor has her taken into hospital, suspecting anorexia. In hospital, Maria tells the family's au pair Bernadette that she has offered her life to God in exchange for Johannes's recovery. She asks for Father Weber to give communion. Maria suffers respiratory arrest while trying to swallow the communion wafer, and dies. At the moment of her death, Johannes speaks for the first time, saying her name. As Maria's parents select a coffin, her mother tells the funeral director that she hopes Maria will be beatified. Christian drops a flower into Maria's grave.

Third Person

Belgium/USA/Germany/Italy 2013

Director: Paul Haggis

Certificate 15 136m 31s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

When his aggrieved publisher tells Liam Neeson's Pulitzer-winning novelist that his output has been on a downward spiral since his early award-garlanded triumph, it's hard not to surmise that writer-director Paul Haggis is taking the words from his critics' mouths – or perhaps even being brutally honest with himself. *Third Person* positively encourages such supposition, putting centre-stage a creative artist who's in a funk, and whose struggles with his chosen form appear to indicate an ongoing emotional ferment (or, as the same tough-love editor opines, "random characters making excuses for your life").

If Neeson's Paris-set story represents a possible *film à clef*, what then are we to make of *Third Person*'s other segments? Rome hosts fashion-business hustler Adrien Brody's seemingly wilful desire to help stricken Moran Atlas rescue her unseen daughter from money-grabbing smugglers, even though he's increasingly aware that he's in the grip of a 'Spanish Prisoner' confidence trick; meanwhile in New York an emotionally raw Mila Kunis is barely holding it together while fighting her sleek artist ex James Franco for visiting rights to their son. Unlike Haggis's 2004 Oscar winner *Crash*, where the metaphor of collision held together a survey of America's attitude to race (rather too clunkily for many detractors), here Haggis prefers to keep us guessing about the thematic connection between the film's three busily interwoven strands.

Editor Jo Francis does a sterling job of keeping the whole thing bustling forward, even though all

three sagas of romantic dysfunction appear somewhat over-extended. But Haggis clearly misjudges how much he should let slip about the essentially literary basis of the resolution. Indeed, by the time he delivers the final-reel ta-daah, delineating fact from authorial invention in what we've just seen, he's given far too much away and the audience is miles ahead of him. It's the sort of catastrophic misjudgement that can often cloud one's lasting opinion – but it would be churlish not to recognise that Haggis's facility for spiky dialogue and his excellent cast prove most diverting on a scene-by-scene basis. While the overriding thrust of drumming up sympathy for a middle-aged white male philanderer struck by personal and creative setbacks is essentially a tad resistible, Olivia Wilde certainly plays Neeson's acid-tongued, deeply troubled lover to the hilt, and Kunis gives her tearful all to the shambolic, ill-fated mother treated with glacial scorn by an effectively smug Franco. Dario Marianelli's slinky score, rippling piano and baleful bandoneon, providing impetus and mystery as and when required, certainly adds to the film's superficial attractiveness, so it's a shame that ultimate directorial lack of control lets the side down.

Still, in throwing seemingly personal neuroses at the screen and creating a work that, however flawed, is held together by (dare one say?) Pirandellian conceit rather than the usual prosaic narrative button-pushing, Haggis can't be accused of playing it safe. The days when he wrote back-to-back Academy Award winners may seem to be slipping further into the past, but he's certainly not going down without a fight. Ⓜ



Liam Neeson, Olivia Wilde

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Paul Breuls
Michael Nozik
Paul Haggis
Written by
Paul Haggis
Director of Photography
Gian Filippo Corticelli
Edited by
Jo Francis
Production Designer
Laurence Bennett
Music
Dario Marianelli
Sound Mixer
Gilberto Martinelli
Costume Designer
Sonoo Mishra

©Filmfinance XII
Production Companies
Corsan presents a
Corsan, Highway
61 production
in association
with Volten,
Lailaps Pictures,
Filmfinance XII
A film by Paul Haggis
Made with the
aid of the Belgian
Tax Shelter
Made with the
generous support

of the Apulia Film
Commission
Executive Producers
Nils Dunker
Anatole Taubman
Arcady Golubovich
Timothy D. O'Hair
Guy Tannahill
Fahar Faizaan
Andrew David
Hopkins

Cast
Liam Neeson
Michael
Mila Kunis
Julia
Adrien Brody
Scott
Olivia Wilde
Anna
James Franco
Rick
Moran Atlas
Monika
Vinicio Marchioni
Carlo
Maria Bello
Theresa
Kim Basinger
Elaine
David Harewood
Jake
Loan Chabanol
Sam

Riccardo Scamarcio
Marco
Oliver Crouch
Jesse

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing

Paris, Rome and New York, present day. Pulitzer-winning American novelist Michael is in a hotel, struggling with the draft of his latest book. Estranged from his US-based spouse Elaine, he's now involved with Anna, a journalist with literary ambitions of her own. She is staying in a room on the floor below so that they can continue their affair – though she is also receiving texts from another man. Meanwhile Scott is in Rome to steal designs from a corrupt fashion insider. He finds himself bewitched by the mysterious Monika, draining his resources to pay the smugglers who are supposedly bringing her daughter from abroad, even though he's increasingly convinced it's a scam. In New York, former soap actress Julia is battling for custody of her son, who is staying with his artist father Rick following a near-fatal accident while in her care. Monika and Scott elope together. A tearful Julia causes Rick to reflect on his culpability as an absent dad. Julia's lawyer is Scott's wife Theresa – their marriage was devastated by their daughter's accidental drowning due to Scott's negligence.

Julia, Rick, Scott and Monika are revealed to be fictional characters in Michael's new manuscript, which also exposes the real Anna's incestuous relationship with her father. Elaine is forgiving after reading the manuscript; as Michael visualises the elusive Anna, Julia and Monika in a Rome street, he confesses that infidelity caused the inattention leading to his own son's drowning, and he is now trying to exorcise his guilt in literary form.

This Is Where I Leave You

USA 2014

Director: Shawn Levy

Certificate 15 103m 9s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Just as Georges Franju audaciously made a bloodless horror film with *Eyes Without a Face* (1960), so Shawn Levy has made a tearless film about mourning – everyone in *This Is Where I Leave You* is too wrapped up in his or her own problems to get upset about their recently deceased father. There's another, equally conspicuous absence: the Jewish family sitting Shiva (the Jewish week-long period of mourning) here is portrayed almost entirely by non-Jewish actors. Such an elision is part of the social fabric of the US – formerly 'inferior' immigrants from eastern and southern Europe made their full transition to whiteness during the post-war years, while Native Americans, Latinos, Asians and blacks remained racially 'other'. Yet it's no less insensitive to mark a culture or religion solely through the food in their kitchen (there are several pointless slow pans here across plates of half-eaten corn-beef sandwiches and pickles) and snarky comments about the ritual they're supposedly observing.

'Observant' is the operative word here, for the members of the comically dysfunctional Altman family are both totally detached from their Jewishness and any self-awareness that would allow them to see how they have ended up so unhappy. Judd (Jason Bateman) has a lucrative career in radio and a beautiful wife – until he catches his shock-jock boss in bed with her. His loudmouth sister Wendy (Tina Fey) is a mother of two who's married to a jerky workaholic and pines for her ex-boyfriend Horry. (Their romance was cut short when Horry suffered a severe brain injury in a car accident, and Timothy Olyphant plays what could've descended into parody well, even though he's repeatedly given lines such as, "I have a severe brain injury.") Judd's tight-ass older brother Paul (Corey Stoll) can't get his wife pregnant, and Judd's baby brother Phillip (Adam Driver) is an idiot manchild who's dating his much older psychologist.

Despite their individual flaws and suffering, all the siblings have some advice to give to Judd, usually in ways that help to develop his otherwise emotionally featureless character. Wendy offers: "You don't do complicated. You've had your whole life mapped out." This staggeringly generic insight is apparently something Judd has never considered, and he ends up repeating it several times, only slightly rephrased. (Even at the best of times, the true nature of family is not only saying things that need to be said but also sometimes saying too much, which the dialogue here fails to convey.) Such instances of spontaneous sweetness are either delivered unrealistically earnestly or buried alongside lame attempts to be raunchy: the matriarch, played by Jane Fonda, has had breast augmentation in later life, so her gigantic, liver-spotted breasts often pop out of her clothes; at one point, Wendy goes into her mother's room for a chat and rests her head against them, pausing to note how comfortable they are.

Judd slowly gets his groove back, despite having no reliable source of income and complications from his soon-to-be-ex. The twist, underscoring how Judaism is merely a pretext here, is that Judd's (gentile) mother made up her husband's last wish for the family

to sit Shiva together. It turns out that Judd's parents had already introduced Horry's mother into their marriage, and the two women plan to continue the arrangement – the time spent together as a family has simply been an opportunity for the siblings to process this news. Though surprised, everyone immediately accepts the new arrangement, and soon some alt-pop junk in the style of The Lumineers starts playing, hey-ing and ho-ing away to show how much they – and we – have grown. More than its insensitivity, Levy's film is remarkable for immediately, irreparably dating itself with this choice. **S**



Up in the air: Tina Fey, Jason Bateman

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Paula Weinstein
Shawn Levy
Jeffrey Levine
Screenplay
Jonathan Tropper
Based on his novel
Director of Photography
Terry Stacey
Edited by
Dean Zimmerman
Production Designer
Ford Wheeler
Music
Michael Giacchino
Sound Mixer
Danny Michael
Costumes Designed by
Susan Lyall

Warner Bros. Pictures presents in association with RatPac-Dune Entertainment a Spring Creek, 21 Laps production A Shawn Levy film With the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development
Executive Producers
Mary McLaglen
Jonathan Tropper
James Packer
Steven Munchin

Cast
Jason Bateman
Judd Altman
Tina Fey
Wendy Altman
Jane Fonda
Hilary Altman

Adam Driver
Phillip Altman
Rose Byrne
Penny Moore
Corey Stoll
Paul Altman
Kathryn Hahn
Annie Altman
Connie Britton
Tracy Sullivan
Timothy Olyphant
Horry Callen
Dax Shepard
Wade Beaufort
Debra Monk
Linda Callen
Abigail Spencer
Quinn Altman

Dolby Digital/ Datasat Colour by Technicolor [2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

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Production Companies

US, the present. Judd Altman comes home to find his wife Quinn in bed with his boss. His sister Wendy calls to tell him that their father has died. After the funeral, their mother Hilary tells Judd and his siblings that their father's dying wish was that they sit Shiva (the Jewish week-long period of mourning) together. Judd runs into Penny, his high-school sweetheart, at his father's sports store. Judd's brothers Phillip and Paul argue about who will inherit the store. Wendy forces Judd to admit to the rest of the family that he's getting a divorce. Phillip has a fight with his girlfriend, and drops Judd off at the ice rink where Penny works. They flirt. Quinn tells Judd that she's pregnant with his child. Judd sleeps with Penny. Wendy sleeps with her ex, Horry. Quinn almost miscarries, and Judd's boss ends their affair. Hilary reveals that she's in a relationship with Horry's mother, and that sitting Shiva was just a pretext to get everyone together to accept this fact. Judd promises to call Penny after he's had some time to himself, and drives to Maine instead of his home in Manhattan.

What We Do in the Shadows

New Zealand/USA 2014

Directors: Jemaine Clement, Taika Waititi

Certificate 15 85m 23s

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

Four vampires live together in a flat. They behave like first-year students – like characters from *The Young Ones*, except that they're all rather old. It's 'The Old Ones', then. Petyr is the Nosferatu in the basement – he's been dead so long there's not much vestige of humanity left in him. Viago, sweet-natured and always smiling, has invited a human film crew into the house to make a documentary. Deacon believes that being a vampire makes him sexy. Vladislav is a Vlad Dracul type who sees dungeons and torture as the way to go but is haunted by an encounter with an emasculating woman. They float around the flat with vacuum cleaners. Visual gags – very good ones – abound. The vampires squabble about who does the washing-up. They hate werewolves and hiss at them like cats. The werewolves, who tend to prowl around in packs, have anger-management issues: "Remember we're werewolves, *not* swearwolves!" their leader exhorts.

The flatmates start to let hipster humans into their everyday life. They accidentally turn one into a vampire, and he then introduces them to the pleasures of nightclubs and the internet. In this sense the nearest kin to *What We Do in the Shadows* is the HBO show *True Blood*, in which vampires try to integrate into normal society. There's an occasional but not very enthusiastic stab at poignancy, for example when Viago stands outside the house of the woman who is his great love but who is now an old lady, having continued to age as he stays forever young.

An extended comedy sketch aiming for student cult status (and likely to get it), *Shadows* incorporates three powerful paradigms quite neatly – it's a flatshare comedy, a fish-out-of-water comedy and a generational comedy. Imagine if the makers of *Flight of the Conchords* had watched too many films and TV shows involving Klaus Kinski, Robert Pattinson, Tom Cruise, Roman Polanski, Anna Paquin and Kåre Hedebrant – and then asked the designer of *The Hobbit* to build them a vampire house in Wellington, New Zealand.

In fact, this is exactly what has happened. Jemaine Clement, the bespectacled one from *Conchords*, co-stars and co-directs with Taika Waititi, who also wrote and directed an episode



The elegant in the room: Waititi, Brugh

of *Conchords*. The other actors are mostly well-known comedians or comic actors in their native New Zealand. Despite its Kiwi flavour, however, there's a noticeable affinity with Christopher Guest's comedies of the grotesque – though perhaps *Shadows* has a bit more heart. It's more *Withnail* than *Best in Show*.

Set and production design is by Ra Vincent, who was Oscar-nominated for his work on *The Hobbit*; the music – folk-, punk- and gypsy-inflected – is from Plan 9, who are Peter Jackson's go-to soundtrack people. The script is largely improvised, expanding on a short film made by Waititi in 2005, and it seems that the shoot was baggy and relaxed, since according to the press notes there were 125 hours of footage to edit. Despite this capaciousness in production, *Shadows* is genre-loaded as tightly as a tourniquet – though it works, this reviewer would guess, whether you know the references or not. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Taika Waititi
Chelsea Winstanley
Emanuel Michael
Written by
Jemaine Clement
Taika Waititi
Cinematography
DJ Stipsen
Richard Bluck
Editing
Jonno Woodford-
Robinson

Yana Gorskaya
Tom Eagles
Production Designer
Ra Vincent
Original Music
Plan 9
Sound Recordist
Chris Hiles
Costume Designer
Amanda Neale

©Shadow
Pictures Ltd

Production Companies
Unison Films
presents a Defender
Films production in
association with Park
Road Post Production
and the New Zealand
Documentary Board
Produced in
association with
The New Zealand
Film Commission

Cast
Jemaine Clement
Vladislav
Taika Waititi
Viago
Jonathan Brugh
Deacon
Cori Gonzalez-Macuer
Nick
Stu Rutherford
Stu
Ben Fransham

Petyr
Jackie Van Beek
Jackie
Elena Stejko
Pauline, 'The Beast'
Jason Hoyle
Julian

**In Colour and
Black and White
[1.78:1]**
Distributor

Metrodrome
Distribution Ltd

Wellington, New Zealand, present day. Viago, a vampire, has invited a human film crew into his home to make a lifestyle documentary. Viago's flatmates are fellow vampires Deacon, Vladislav and 8,000-year-old Petyr. In a new spirit of openness, the vampires allow young hipster Nick into their home. Nick brings along Stu, whom the vampires like even more. Unfortunately, Nick is bitten by Petyr. Now a vampire, Nick introduces

the others to the world of the internet and nightclubs. On one outing, the vampires bump into a vampire-hunter, who subsequently breaks into their flat and kills Petyr. Stu is abducted by werewolves. The flatmates let Stu back into the fold even though it seems he might now be a werewolf. Viago bites the woman who is still the love of his life, though she is now grown old. They all live happily together.

Winter Sleep

Turkey/France/Germany 2014
Director: Nuri Bilge Ceylan

See Feature
on page 30

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

The end credits of Nuri Bilge Ceylan's Palme d'Or-winning feature mention Chekhov, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky and Voltaire, all of them, it appears, directly quoted in the film. But the line that *Winter Sleep* most obviously brings to mind is from Sartre: "Hell is other people." The characters in this singularly claustrophobic *hüs clos* drama painfully tear each other apart, not least when they think they are acting with good intentions. The eager-to-please country *hodja* (Islamic teacher) Hamdi tries to calm the tension between his embittered brother Ismail and their landlord Aydin by taking his nephew to apologise to Aydin for vandalising his jeep; the result is worse discord. And when Aydin's young wife Nihal tries to help Hamdi's family by handing over a wad of banknotes, Ismail responds with devastatingly quiet contempt before flinging the money on the fire – in its depiction of unassuageable despair and pride, the most Dostoevskian moment here.

Winter Sleep is without doubt a formidably achieved, intellectually substantial drama that deals variously with questions of conscience, responsibility and self-deception. These topics catch the imagination when they are worked through in the narrative, but they grip considerably less when picked over explicitly in long, stagey discussions. *Winter Sleep* is a film inspired by theatre – Ceylan has long proclaimed his love of Chekhov – and filled with theatrical allusions, including the masks and posters in Aydin's study (he is a retired actor). Understandable, then, that it should feel theatrical; but if *Winter Sleep* is Ceylan's most ambitious screenplay (he co-wrote it with his wife and regular collaborator Ebru Ceylan), it is far from his most successful film.

On a first viewing in Cannes this year, my feeling was that *Winter Sleep* was a film to be reckoned with, and possibly a great one, but not quite one to be much enjoyed. Watching it again, I still find it hard to savour, despite many masterful qualities – and perhaps it's because of those qualities, which never quite cohere into a dynamic whole, that *Winter Sleep* is all the more disappointing. An imposing portrait of a vain, deluded, yet intensely charming man in decline – a minor-league Lear of the steppes – the drama is involved and wide-ranging, with several subplots running in tandem despite the ostensible lack of action. But for much of the time, the characters do little except talk at length, in darkened rooms. These people are nothing if not articulate, and are acted with subtle, sometimes mischievous brio; but some of the longer dialogues (the showdown between Aydin and Nihal lasts roughly 30 minutes) feel like transcribed chapters of a novel. And the emotional and intellectual shifts traced by the exchanges are not always easy to follow: it would, for example, take more than one viewing to properly gauge the dynamics of the triangle between Nihal, Aydin and the latter's recently divorced sister Necla, who lives with them, and the (largely hidden) background to their grievances.

From a filmmaker who is also held to be a landscape photographer of considerable brilliance, *Winter Sleep* is highly perverse: set in a



The inn crowd: Haluk Bilginer

breath-taking setting, the mountainous expanses of Cappadocia, the film gives us several striking outdoor moments, yet chooses to keep us mostly indoors, in the cave-like rooms of the hotel where Aydin has essentially dug in to shelter (hibernation is one meaning of the title; another is the implication that he is sleepwalking through the final act of his life). There is a dramatic logic to the play of interior and exterior, emphasised by Gökhan Tiryaki's widescreen photography; we feel the enclosure all the more because of what we've glimpsed outdoors, and when we head out again, it feels like a welcome escape. Yet the film is claustrophobically static for long stretches, and the moments when *Winter Sleep* finds its dramatic life only underline the heaviness of the rest.

But when *Winter Sleep* comes alive, it is as powerful and suggestive as any Ceylan film. The script plays the long game, setting up early crises that play out much later: a chat with a visiting motorcyclist leads to Aydin's having a wild horse captured, then much later releasing it, in a mesmerising night shot; and Aydin's early visit to Hamdi is echoed at the end in

Nihal's humiliating encounter with Ismail.

This latter scene puts the stamp on *Winter Sleep* as the work of a magnificent director of actors. However finely sketched the character of Hamdi is in the script, as a man trying to please everyone and maintaining a tenuous grip on his own dignity in the process, his dilemma most deeply finds its meaning in actor Serhat Kilic's painfully ambivalent grin. The three lead performances are superb, with Demet Akbag having a showstopping moment as Necla, coolly demolishing her brother from the comfort of his own sofa. But it's in their silence that these performances are often the most eloquent; the film offers a prize instance of the Kuleshov effect, as Melisa Sözen's Nihal confronts Haluk Bilginer's Aydin, and Ceylan keeps cutting back to Bilginer, barely changing as he half-smiles through his grizzled beard, although his look seems to mean something different in every shot. It is such quietly but resonantly cinematic moments that offer a glimpse of the great film in *Winter Sleep*, as opposed to the ambitious, intellectually rigorous but rather laborious screen novel that it ultimately is. ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Zeynep Özbatur
Atakan

Screenplay
Ebru Ceylan
Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Inspired by the stories
of Anton Chekhov

**Director of
Photography**
Gökhan Tiryaki

Editors
Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Bora Gökşingöl
Art Director
Gartze Kus

Sound Recordist
Andreas Mücke
Niesytka

@Zeyno Film,
Memento Films
Production, Bredok
Film Production,
Arte France Cinéma,
NBC Film
**Production
Companies**
A Zeyno Film,
Memento Films
Production, Bredok
Film Production

production
In collaboration with
Arte France Cinéma,
Mars Entertainment
Group, Imaj
With the participation
of TC Kültür Turizm
Bakanlığı Sinema
Genel Müdürlüğü,
Arte France,
Medienboard Berlin-
Brandenburg, Aide aux
Cinemas du Monde,
Centre National du
Cinéma et de l'Image
Animée, Ministère des

Affaires Étrangères,
Institut Français,
Post Republic, Sony
Executive Producer
Sezgi Üstün

Cast
Haluk Bilginer
Aydin
Melisa Sözen
Nihal
Demet Akbag
Necla
Ayberk Pekcan
Hidayet, driver

Serhat Kilic
Hamdi, Imam
Tamer Levent
Suavi
Nadir Saribacak
Levent, teacher
Mehmet Ali Nuroglu
Timur, hotel guest
Nejat Isler
Ismail

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

Turkish theatrical title
Kis uykusu

Cappadocia, Anatolia, winter. Aydin, an elderly retired actor, runs a hotel on his late father's estate; he lives there with his young wife Nihal and his divorced sister Necla. The window of Aydin's jeep is smashed by the young son of unemployed tenant Ismail, who has fallen foul of his rent collectors; Ismail's brother Hamdi brings the boy to the hotel to apologise, but he faints. Necla launches an attack on her brother, who writes an

opinionated column for a local newspaper. Nihal holds a meeting to raise money for a nearby school but excludes Aydin; later, they have a bitter argument. Aydin leaves for Istanbul but instead spends a drunken evening at the home of a former friend. Nihal gives Hamdi the money she has raised for the school, for his struggling family, but Ismail angrily burns the banknotes. Aydin returns home and starts writing his long-planned book.

Home cinema



Hard-hitting: the high-definition restoration of *Goto, Isle of Love* was crowdfunded, meaning fans really did put their money where their mouths are

REASONS TO BELIEVE

A new box-set makes a persuasive case for placing Polish director Walerian Borowczyk in the pantheon of filmmaking greats

CAMERA OBSCURA: THE WALERIAN BOROWCZYK COLLECTION

THE BEAST/IMMORAL TALES/BLANCHE/
GOTO, ISLE OF LOVE/THE THEATRE OF
MR AND MRS KABAL/SHORT FILMS

Walerian Borowczyk; France 1959-84; Arrow Academy Region B/2 Blu-ray/DVD; certificate 18; 1.37:1, 1.66:1, 1.85:1; Features: 344 page book edited by Daniel Bird and Michael Brooke; English translation of Borowczyk's 1992 collection of short stories, *Anatomy of the Devil*; documentaries featuring cast and crew, hour-long portrait of Borowczyk; introduction to the short films by Terry Gilliam; Borowczyk's commercials; *Blow Ups* visual essay by Daniel Bird; *Film is not a Sausage*; Borowczyk's *Short Films*; new interview programme featuring Borowczyk, producer Dominique Duvergé-Ségrétin, assistant André Heinrich and composer Bernard Parmegian

Reviewed by Kim Newman

This box-set is much more than a Blu-ray/DVD assemblage of Walerian Borowczyk's best-known

films; it's a persuasive, deliberate bid to elevate an often overlooked, marginalised or ignored filmmaker to the pantheon. The simple fact that Borowczyk has received this sort of treatment means that his partisans' enthusiasm – the high-definition restoration of *Goto, Isle of Love* (*Goto, l'île d'amour*) was crowdfunded, meaning that fans really did put their money where their mouths are – must command respect. The set sold out almost before release (though individual discs are still available), which limits its ability to preach to the unconverted, but true believers who stuck by Boro during his hard times, which famously extended to a troubled experience directing *Emmanuelle 5* (1987), will be treasuring the result.

The set does not claim to be complete – it assembles the Polish-born director's French output from 1959 to 1984 and thus lacks his Polish-made shorts (including the crucial *Dom*, 1958, co-directed with Jan Lenica) and feature *The Story of Sin* (*Dzieje grzechu*, 1975). There is an attempt to address if not counter the commonplace that Borowczyk began as a serious artist and declined into softcore pornography, noting the interest in the erotic (especially the fetishisation of everyday or antique objects) present in the early live-action and animated

shorts (and even his most chaste feature, *Blanche*). Viewing the films in order, it's impossible to miss the continuity of vision from the surreal, spiky, disturbing animated feature *The Theatre of Mr and Mrs Kabal* (*Théâtre de Monsieur et Madame Kabal*, 1967) through the dissociated, dreamlike *Goto* and the austere medieval drama *Blanche* (1972) to the uninhibited yet curiously cadenced *Immoral Tales* (*Contes immoraux*, 1974) and the scandalous, blackly comic *The Beast* (*La Bête*, 1975).

The first three had a limited art-film exposure – though it's plain that *Blanche* is an attempt at something more mainstream than *Mr and Mrs Kabal* or *Goto* – and resonated with audiences and critics who had noticed the short films. However, the last two films in this set were commercially successful in the era when Just Jaeckin's *Emmanuelle* (1974) was establishing an international market for chic French sex films – Borowczyk even hired Sylvia Kristel for *The Streetwalker* (*La Marge*, 1976) – though *The Beast* was subject to troubles with British censorship, fully documented here.

In this context, it is clear that the 'sex films' emerge from Borowczyk's own interests and obsessions rather than being tailored to fit a genre that didn't really exist when he set out

on his immoral tales project. *The Beast* began as *The Beast of Gévaudan*, an episode of his first anthology film; the alternate cut of *Immoral Tales*, which includes the 22-minute sequence that would become the interpolated dream of the heroine of *The Beast*, is included here.

Arrow's set features a wealth of supplements. Worthies from Terry Gilliam to Peter Bradshaw are pulled in to deliver individual on-camera introductions to the feature films; every title is complemented (and complimented) by a retrospective 'making of' documentary; separate features concentrate on the short films and on Borowczyk's work as a sculptor; there's a lengthy 1985 Borowczyk interview and also a useful general introductory documentary. Certain collaborators – cinematographer Noël Véry and assistant Dominique Duvergé – crop up often, delivering especial insight; nearly an hour of silent on-set footage of Borowczyk directing *The Beast* is included, which Véry helpfully comments on, skipping slightly over the replacement of the leading lady only a day or so into production but wryly pointing out how typical of the director was the care he we see him taking when personally applying a prosthetic tail to the uncomfortable actor (Pierre Benedetti) revealed as a beast in the climax. Elsewhere, there is some comment that certain performers were frustrated working with a director who could be found up a ladder painting tiny details on the set but seldom talked with them. Borowczyk claims that he hired the likes of Pierre Brasseur (*Goto*), Michel Simon (*Blanche*) and Marcel Dalio (*The Beast*) for their screen personas, and didn't feel a need to tell them precisely what to do, though Véry also suggests that at that point in his career Borowczyk's French was broken and heavily accented (which it doesn't seem to be in the 1985 interview) and he found it easier to get what he wanted by miming scenes and asking actors to imitate him (not an approach guaranteed to work on veteran stars – especially when he wanted presence rather than performance). The great Borowczyk performer may be his wife Ligia Branice, star of *Goto* and *Blanche*, who mostly uses her eyes – her 'look' is the original of most of the immoral women in subsequent Borowczyk movies; it's a shame that she doesn't appear in any of the extras.

The *Kabal* disc includes a programme of Borowczyk's shorts, which – as Raymond Durnat and Philip Strick argue in insightful essays – would be enough to establish him as an important filmmaker even if he had never made a feature: *The Astronauts* (1959), *The Concert* (1962, an introduction to *Mr and Mrs Kabal*), *Grandma's Encyclopedia* (1963), *Renaissance* (1964), *Angels' Games* (1964), *Joachim's Dictionary* (1965), *Rosalie* (1966), *Gavotte* (1967), *Diptych* (1967), *The Phonograph* (1969), *The Greatest Love of All Time* (1977) and *Scherzo Infernal* (1984). *A Private Collection* (1973) and *Venus on the Half Shell* (1975), playful documentaries about erotic artefacts, are extracted from the shorts programme and partnered with the features they were intended to accompany and elucidate, *Immoral Tales* and *The Beast*. A slightly longer pre-release cut of *A Private Collection* is



Immoral Tales

included, though UK law means that some still-offending frames have to be blanked out.

Renaissance and *The Phonograph* are fully the equal of the animated shorts Jan Svankmajer was making at the time – and the use of inanimate objects prefigures the peculiar obsessiveness that recurs throughout Borowczyk's work. For him, eroticism is often in distractions: in the most blatant sex-fantasy sequence in *Immoral Tales*, for example, as the action any real pornographer would zoom in on gets started, Borowczyk's camera not only fixes on the symbolic crashing waves that have substituted for sex since silent cinema, but also on the patterns made by wheeling seabirds over the beach where a young man has persuaded his willing cousin to act out his own fantasy while obtusely failing to understand hers. The most provocative moments in *The Beast* depend on a rhythmic subjective camera movement rather than the gushing prosthesis and bug-eyed nymphomaniac performance that attracted all the censorious ire.

A work of heroic endeavour on the part of restorers/documentarians Daniel Bird, James White and Michael Brooke, this may be only the first step in a general reassessment of Borowczyk. Of the later films, the Stevenson adaptation

On the strength of the work shown here, even 'Emmanuelle 5' might merit a second look



The Beast

Dr Jekyll et les femmes (1981) is perhaps (along with *Blanche*) his single most satisfying feature; it develops the worldview of the earlier works, combining the unbridled passions of the immoral tales with the domestic horrors of the *Kabals* or the more extreme shorts. (Borowczyk's preferred title was *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Miss Osbourne*, but it could equally be *The Theatre of Dr Jekyll and Miss Osbourne* – as Mr Hyde and Jekyll's transformed fiancée rampage through a household of smug Victorians.) There may also be good reason to revisit *The Streetwalker*, one of Borowczyk's few contemporary-set works, and his version of Wedekind's *Lulu* (1980), with Udo Kier, his Dr Jekyll, as Jack the Ripper – not to mention his nunsploration essay *Behind Convent Walls* (*Interno di un convento*, 1978) and *Immoral Tales* follow-up *Immoral Women* (*Les Héroïnes du mal*, 1979). On the strength of the work shown here, even *Emmanuelle 5* might merit a second look, though its release version was not what the director intended.

Even the sleeves of this set are packed with content: Arrow's elegant photographic covers can be reversed to showcase Borowczyk's own, scratchier designs (he began as a poster artist). The 'booklet' that fills out the sturdy slipcase almost earns a review of its own: it comprises a substantial collection of critical writings, including pertinent pieces by Durnat, Strick, Patrice Leconte, David Thompson, Peter Graham, Chris Newby and Robert Benayoun; some of these are drawn from *Sight & Sound*, showing how long this publication has been a booster of Boro (though Tom Milne, another fervent admirer, is sadly left out but for a single, unattributed review quote). Editors Bird and Brooke take care to feature additional notes about the restorations and the valiant effort involved in showing these films in their best light: seeing them again in superb-quality transfers after decades of battered prints or bootlegs enhances appreciation of Borowczyk's remarkable, rigorous frame-making and astonishing eye for tapestry-like detail. The double-covered book flips over to become the first English-language edition of Borowczyk's short-story collection *Anatomy of the Devil* (1992). The 'stories' tend to be fragments, anecdotes, experiments and oddities with accompanying artwork – oblique on their own, but intriguing footnotes to a multimedia body of work. 📺



Blanche

New releases

FILMS BY FRANK BORZAGE

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED YOU

USA 1946; Olive Films/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 117 minutes; 1.37:1

MAGNIFICENT DOLL

USA 1946; Olive Films/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 96 minutes; 1.37:1

THAT'S MY MAN

USA 1947; Olive Films/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 99 minutes; 1.37:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

The auteurist salvation of Frank Borzage has been one of the most rewarding film-culture shifts of the past quarter of a century; not long ago, even his late silents and 30s melodramas were all but forgotten, and today seem on the verge of becoming canonical. From *Lazybones* (1925) to *Moonrise* (1948) at least, an expansive stretch that leaves out several silents and includes perhaps another dozen forgettable studio projects, Borzage unleashed a distinctive sensibility on the clockwork of glam Hollywood storytelling: naturalistic sensitivity in the service of a mythopoetic romanticism that often careered into pure magical thinking. Borzage was the quintessential romantic in a throng of Golden Age romantics, a true but never naive believer in the unpredictable gravity of the heart, treating with reverence absurd lovesick plot twists that other directors would employ as kitsch, and attending in almost every film a tincture of thoughtful heartbreak.

Of course, the man's career scans like a decades-long struggle to accommodate his studio bosses and still locate the Borzagiana in life, and so these three late films – made as his career dissipated, with only three more credited features to go over the next 12 years – are forgotten secondary works, often dismissed for the very tonal flights and dreamy pulse-beats that make them so identifiably his. Gone are the silvery fantasy launches of the interbellum and the larger budgets of the early 40s; here, Borzage finds himself in a newly hardened post-war America, and he explores subcultures almost as a means of finding some way back into innocence. The finest of the three, *I've Always Loved You*, may be the best and most serious film ever made about classical piano, centred on the impossible romantic bond between Philip Dorn's faithless, egomaniacal European maestro and his protégée, corn-fed Pennsylvania schoolgirl Catherine McLeod.

A frozen-faced discovery of Borzage's who was quite apparently trained as a pianist, McLeod makes for an oddly awkward heroine, but the film around her is so music-drenched and so devoted to the details and romantic aura of its world that the cast and characters don't matter as much as the swoonsome ideas they embody. A few major set pieces make the point: one famous sequence has the estranged quasi-lovers, each alone and hundreds of miles apart, both daydreamily playing Beethoven's 'Appassionata' at the same time, in synch, Borzage cutting back and forth between them in a wordless suite of cosmic connectivity. But that's eclipsed by the majestic 15-minute *tour de force* of the heroine's Carnegie Hall debut, playing Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 2 with her master conducting, just as their relationship is crippled by betrayal and jealousy. The performance is immediately seen as a contest of wills – stagehands, rooting for McLeod's ingénue, commend her by signing their



Kings of comedy: *The Clowns*

own names to a delivered bouquet of flowers – and bitternesses and fears arise during the playing, palpable to everyone but never articulated, as the music pours on and the pianist begins to cry as she pounds through the achingly sad concerto. It's the most emotionally torturous exploration of concert culture in the Hollywood annals.

Magnificent Doll, an unsliced bologna log written by nascent bestselling trash novelist Irving Stone and imagining a love triangle between post-Revolutionary icons Dolly Madison (Ginger Rogers), Aaron Burr (David Niven) and James Madison (a sweet Burgess Meredith), is far less notable, though its notion of Burr as a genteel megalomaniac remains disarming.

That's My Man, out of circulation of any kind for decades, returns to Borzage's fable-like tone in the rather simple romantic rise and fall of a mismatched couple – Don Ameche, as a rebellious ex-accountant with irresponsible dreams of owning a champion racehorse, and McLeod as his indulgent better half. Circumstantially, the story ends up being about a marriage that is assailed by his unquenchable thirst for gambling, but rather mysteriously Borzage gives the melancholy scenario the quality of a wistful fairytale, with Roscoe Karns spinning the yarn from his cabbie's seat, imbuing Ameche's stargazer with the stature of a tragically flawed hero of myth. Moments of sheer childlike wonder keep sneaking in: the young couple bedding down on opposite couches, muttering "It's a wonderful world" into the darkness; Ameche's lost boy nuzzling his soulmate horse, quietly asking, "Did I ever tell you I love you?" and so on. Not a great movie all in all, but it's enough to make you wonder if Borzage wasn't Golden Age Hollywood's equivalent of Blake or Shelley, reaching for the fabulistic and transcendent.

Disc: Standard archive prints, very clean.

DAS CABINET DES DR CALIGARI

Robert Wiene; Germany 1920; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/

Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate

U; 77 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: commentary by David

Kalat, documentary 'Caligari: The Birth of Horror in the

First World War', video essay by David Cairns 'You Must

Become Caligari', restoration notes, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Accounts differ but it seems likely that the role-reversal framing story of *Caligari*, where the narrator turns out to be a lunatic and the

monstrous doctor is revealed as the caring asylum head, was suggested by Fritz Lang. (It's also been suggested that Lang was originally slated to direct, until producer Erich Pommer diverted him on to part two of *Die Spinnen*.) Not everyone, then or since, has approved of the change. Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer, writers of the original story, vainly protested, and Siegfried Kracauer later argued that "while the original story exposed the madness inherent in authority, [Robert] Wiene's *Caligari* glorified authority and convicted its antagonist of madness", thus mirroring the inclination of "most Germans" in the fraught post-war period to "retreat into a shell".

Whether for this reason or not, *Caligari* scored a major hit in its domestic market. It also became the first German film to make it big internationally, kickstarting the Golden Age of German silent cinema and, with its mix of visual stylisation and macabre subject matter, prefiguring much that followed: Lang's *Destiny* (1921) and *Dr Mabuse* (1922), Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), Paul Leni's *Waxworks* (1924) and Pabst's *Secrets of a Soul* (1926). It wasn't without its predecessors, such as Paul Wegener's *The Golem* (1919) and Robert Reinert's *Nerves* (1919), but *Caligari*'s unprecedented impact outstripped them all. It also overshadowed its director's career; Wiene's other 40-odd films, before and after, have faded into obscurity.

Much of the film's haunting power derives from the expressionist set designs of Hermann Warm. The frame story apart, there's not the least attempt at realism: the scenery is blatantly painted on canvas in broad strokes, with little concern for perspective and barely an upright to be seen, as if reflecting a mind askew. The performances of Werner Krauss as Caligari and Conrad Veidt as his somnambulist creature Cesare seem as potentially deranged as the sets, and the final iris-in to the now supposedly benevolent doctor's face leaves a disquieting glint of doubt: just who is the madman?

Disc: Another exemplary restoration from the FW. Murnau Foundation, with a rich gallery of extras.

THE CLOWNS

Federico Fellini; Italy 1970; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/

Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format;

97 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: 'Fellini's Circus' (essay

film by Adriano Aprà), booklet

Reviewed by Pasquale Iannone

As Sam Rohdie points out in *Fellini Lexicon* (2002), "Film is like a circus for Fellini and the clown is its crucial element. Clowning is the structural heart of the Fellinian image."

Between his two large-scale features *Satyricon* (1969) and *Roma* (1972), the director embarked on a smaller, more intimate project for Italian TV, which brought the figure of the clown centre-stage. Less a straight documentary and more a playful essay film, *The Clowns* opens with a boy (a proxy for the young Fellini) being awoken in the dark of night by grunts coming from outside his bedroom window. He opens the shutters and looks down to see a circus tent being hoisted upwards. We cut to the following morning and the boy rushes downstairs ready for school. He sees that outside



FANTASTIC MR ZEMAN

One of the masters of 20th-century illusionism, Karel Zeman has had a profound influence on the fantasy cinema of today

A JESTER'S TALE

Karel Zeman; Czechoslovakia 1964; Second Run/Region O DVD; Certificate PG; 82 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: booklet

Reviewed by Nick Bradshaw

Four years ago, the Czech National Bank issued a special silver 200-crown coin decorated on one side with a collage of figures including Sinbad the Sailor and the Apprentice's Sorcerer, on the other with an action montage featuring a giant octopus wrestling with a submarine as a dirigible flies into view.

The occasion was the centenary of Karel Zeman, one of the masters of fantasy cinema, whose technically ambitious and visually entrancing translations of his literary and artistic forebears deserve renown on a par with Ray Harryhausen, with whom he competed on a series of Sinbad films (released as the 1974 compilation *Adventures of Sinbad the Sailor* aka *A Thousand and One Nights*).

He is perhaps best known, though, for his devotion to the escapades of Jules Verne, which inspired four features between 1955 and 1970 – thereby conferring upon Zeman the mantle of fellow advocate Georges Méliès, whose crafty, anything-goes illusionism he also extended. *An Invention for Destruction* aka *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* (1958), for example, quotes the line engravings by the likes of Léon Benett that illustrated Verne's original editions, adding hatching lines to its live-action sets and costumes while compositing them with an amazingly seamless medley of animation techniques – from stop-motion models, puppets and cut-outs to matte paintings and double exposures – to forge a canvas as panoramic as a James Bond adventure yet as sensuously handmade as a Brothers Quay short.

Later confectioners from Tim Burton to Wes Anderson have tipped their hats to Zeman, but the clearest lineage in terms of tenor and style is to Terry Gilliam, not least in the other two films (besides the Verne quartet) made in this mixed animation/live-action mode. Better known is his *Baron Munchausen* (1961), by repute the best of the several screen versions, with its visual inspiration from Gustave Doré; but there's a very Gilliam-esque rambunctious irreverence in *A Jester's Tale*, which marks its own half-centenary by breaking the duck on quality English-language DVD releases of Zeman's films (though a number are available from the Czech Republic), and simultaneously marks the Second Run label's first foray into animation. (The excavation of buried Eastern European treasure is, of course, the label's stock in trade.)

Set, very lightly, during the less-than-amusing Thirty Years' War, it's a *Candide*-like picaresque



Magic kingdom: Karel Zeman's *A Jester's Tale*

about a dreamy ploughboy, Petr, who's press-ganged into battle, dodges a round of bullets and, having picked up a pair of fellow travellers (an earthier platoon comrade and a gamine peasant girl), ends up guest and sometime prisoner at the castle of either the king or emperor, and indeed for a while an unwitting fiancé to the princess, one of a succession of such with whom the court painter can barely keep up. The quicksand, who-cares geopolitics are wilful (and very Czech New Wave): fortunes here are literally buffeted by the wind, a fat-cheeked apparition that frequents proceedings to turn flags back to front, the battlefield left to right and back again. (Petr's accomplice

He forges a canvas as panoramic as a Bond adventure yet as sensuously handmade as a Brothers Quay short



Valentina Thielová as Countess Veronika

Sergeant Matej tries to stay one step ahead with a reversible battle tunic but has less luck than Lenka, the peasant girl they disguise as a jester.)

It's all very *Good Soldier Svejk* going on *Monty Python* and the *Holy Grail*; you might also discern in Petr's handsome vacuity a touch of Barry Lyndon and his travels, or even something of Sancho Panza in Sergeant Matej, but the general tenor is a very pantomimic, childlike satire. (The screenplay is by writer-turned-director Pavel Juráček, who also wrote *Ikarie XB1* and *Daisies*.) As with the ironical artificiality of Eric Rohmer's *Perceval le Gallois*, the actual depth is in that cartoonishness. Zeman's black-and-white design work here pays tribute to the 17th-century 'Topographia Germaniae' engravings of Matthäus Merian, with sweeping continental battlescapes and magnificent castles, not least the palace that hosts the film's second half. The interiors of the castle are also witty composites of theatrical and matte paintings, and there's a wondrous sequence when Petr wanders the corridors in which the walls seem to come alive and spill their secrets.

As far as the human actors go, Petr Kostka as the journeyman Petr is jejune, even for a Czech New Wave protagonist, though perhaps he's meant to merge into the backdrops – whereas I wanted to see more of Emília Vášáryová, the future doyenne of Slovak theatre, who's able to give her character Lenka a degree of animation even inside her jester's garb. Zeman regular Miloslav Holub gives Matej a raffish, happy-go-lucky quality that defines the material – and shows off a leaping high-speed leg-wiggle (care of the animator) that military tacticians may want to pore over. 

New releases

the tent is now fully upright. He passes his mother, who's ironing in front of the fire, and makes his way tentatively to the open door. Even for Fellini, a director whose filmography abounds with evocative opening scenes, these first two minutes of screen time are breathtaking, especially the last section, with the boy framed in such a way as to recall the famous opening of John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956).

The film takes us inside the tent and we experience the circus show from the perspective of the young Fellini. The director's voiceover goes on to explain how the figures he saw at the circus as a child reminded him of real-life characters in the Emilia-Romagna provinces (these include a "clumsy, clowning tramp", a "dwarf nun", squabbling coachmen and a menacing WWI veteran). Fellini then moves into film-essay/mockumentary territory: he introduces his film crew and becomes more of an onscreen presence himself. He's briefly reunited with *La dolce vita*'s Anita Ekberg, for instance, and is shown interviewing various figures, including clown historian Tristan Rémy in Paris.

With an air of melancholy typical of the director (and reflected in Nino Rota's score), *The Clowns* is proof, if any were needed, that Fellini and the essay film were made for one another.

Disc: The transfer is exceptional, allowing viewers to appreciate fully *The Clowns'* glorious colour palette. A 42-minute visual essay by Italian critic Adriano Aprà provides fascinating insight into the film, including details of its original TV transmission (in black-and-white!) on Christmas Day 1970.

THE DEATH KISS

Edwin L. Marin; USA 1932; Kino Classics/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 71 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: audio commentary by historian Richard Harland Smith

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

A surprising and forgotten fossil from Hollywood's Poverty Row in the early talkie age, this ambitious little murder mystery is set entirely on the lot of Tiffany Pictures (renamed, with possible satiric intent, Tonart), a tiny B-picture factory that closed in the same year. You didn't see this kind of opening in 1932 outside of Mamoulian and Ulmer: a nearly two-minute tracking shot from a car interior to a nightclub exterior, featuring multiple dialogue exchanges and culminating in a drive-by murder on the steps, and a pan over to the film crew, with testy director Tom Avery (Edward Van Sloan) shooting the titular thriller.

It's only a movie, except life imitates art and the star is really dead – leaving nosy young staff screenwriter Franklyn Drew (David Manners) to get one up on the stodgy police and investigate. The hall of mirrors is pretty deep: everyone (including a very suspicious studio exec played by Bela Lugosi, who is uncomfortable amid the snappy post-*Front Page* banter) eventually gets around to examining the footage of the killing for clues – decades before *Blow-Up* and *Blow Out*.

Meanwhile, the film delivers a stunningly rich portrait of daily life on a small Hollywood lot: the story takes us through real departments (lighting, props etc) populated by real crew workers, while the head office is home to stereotypically



Hats off: *Fedora*

splenetic Eastern-Euro Jewish owners ("Oy!" Alexander Carr's stereotype trumpets at the news of the murder, "That's going to cost me a fortune!"), flunkies, egomaniac artistes, casting-couch-vet actresses and backstabbing middlemen.

There are sneaky splats of golden hand-tinting by master tinter Gustav Brock, including projector beams, gunfire, scone lights and even the pivotally non-accidental burning of the important footage in the gate, long before *Two-Lane Blacktop*. Of course, the mystery itself, and Manners's rather silly interlocutor, are roughly sketched in (the script was co-written by HUAC blacklisted-to-be Gordon Kahn), and of the three stars inherited from the previous year's hit *Dracula*, only Van Sloan impresses with his savviness. But it remains a pre-Code standout, and a bewitching hunk of history. **Disc:** Lovely HD mastering of Library of Congress-preserved elements, but with erratic image and sound quality, depending on the reel. Richard Harland Smith's commentary doesn't miss a Hollywood-history detail.

FEDORA

Billy Wilder; West Germany/France 1978; Olive Films/Region A/1 Blu-ray/DVD; 114 minutes

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Fedora begins with a suicide and ends with a funeral – and, in between, our narrator steps back to tell us how we got there.

One day, Barry Detweiler, an American independent producer, shows up on the island of Corfu with a script and a prayer, hoping to coax Golden Age actress Fedora out of retirement to play Anna Karenina. (Marthe Keller performs Fedora as a stopover somewhere along the Garbo-Dietrich-Bergman continuum.) Detweiler is hoping to revive his career, but it seems doubtful that *Fedora*'s director Billy Wilder harboured any such delusions about what this film would do for him, even though he used both the flashback structure and one of the stars (William Holden as Detweiler) of one of his greatest critical successes, 1950's *Sunset Blvd.*

The premise seems so custom-tailored to Wilder that one might assume it is an original,

but in fact he and longtime collaborator I.A.L. Diamond were adapting from a story in *Crowned Heads*, the 1976 collection of Hollywood yarns for which actor-turned-writer Tom Tryon (star of *The Cardinal*) drew from his own experience in the industry.

Tryon's *The Other* was made into a marvellously atmospheric 1972 thriller by Robert Mulligan, and *Fedora*, like that film, relies on a personality-switch twist. I won't reveal further detail of what this is, other than to say that it burrows into the psychoses of showbusiness quite pitilessly, and that this is an aggrieved, desolate film. There are bits of business here, such as Detweiler's badinage with a Greek hotel manager played by Mario Adorf, which suggest that Wilder remembered that his métier was allegedly sparkling comedy, but for the most part *Fedora* adopts the rueful and raw tone of Holden's performance. (With this, *Sunset* and his final role in Blake Edwards's 1981 masterpiece *S.O.B.*, Holden might've been the official guilty soul of Tinseltown.)

In some ways, *Fedora* – described on release by Dave Kehr as "*Sunset Blvd.* told from Norma's point of view" – is less near in spirit to Wilder's 1950 film than to Fassbinder's remake a few years later, 1982's *Veronika Voss*. It's Wilder's greatest late film, his *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and its coda might appropriately go: "In Hollywood, when the legend becomes fact, bury the legend."

Disc: An exceptional presentation, with lossless audio doing full justice to a great Miklós Rózsa score.

IGUANA

Monte Hellman; Spain/USA 1988; RaroVideo; 100 minutes; all-region Blu-ray; 16:9; Features: interview with Monte Hellman, booklet, trailer

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Possessing one of the most notoriously, and maddeningly, erratic career arcs in the history of post-war film, Monte Hellman may not be exactly the filmmaker we'd like him to be. His output has been too scant, and too opportunistic; while the Beckettian achievements of *The Shooting* (1966), *Ride the Whirlwind* (1966), *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971) and *Cockfighter* (1974) are redoubtable, thereafter his legacy quickly peters out into unfulfilled projects, uncredited day work and hack jobs. The appearance of *Iguana*, ten years after his last, ill-distributed movie, hardly caused a commotion – it went barely noticed and barely released, and thereafter vanished into the fog of cult auteurist rumour. (Even the eventual DVD debut, in 2001 from Anchor Bay, was both accidentally truncated and underpublicised.)

Derived from a book by prolific post-colonial novelist Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa, itself loosely based on the case of nutty Galapagos coloniser Patrick Watkins, it's a fiercely odd movie, with vestigial traces of the old existentialist vibe. It's the 1800s, and Everett McGill's sailor-harpoonist is cursed with unexplained lizard-skin deformation; constantly persecuted and tortured by his shipmates, he eventually jumps ship and lands on a desert island, which he immediately claims as his own, as a bulwark against the rest of mankind and against God. When stragglers and holidaymakers wash up (including sailor Michael Madsen and sultry rogue baroness Maru

Valdivielso), they are either butchered or enslaved by the new monarch, who exacts his revenge on the world by imitating oppressive colonial power.

Shot largely on the Canary Islands, homeland of Vázquez-Figueroa, Hellman's film can be slow and prosaic, but its essential political force (complicated, if not contradicted, by the protagonist raping and impregnating Valdivielso's royal tramp) has an elemental quality familiar from the director's earlier westerns, and the methodical spectacle of the oppressed irrationally acting out the crimes of the oppressor has a torque that's as Freudian as it is Marxist.

Iguana was not, it turns out, a film that Hellman even wanted to make, and he characterises the production experience as "terrible". If the director's name was unknown, the movie could seem a freaky art-myth that might inspire hope for his or her next opus; from Hellman, it's a head-scratching tangent in a beloved but sketchy trajectory.

Disc: The Blu-ray transfer is fine but RaroVideo's usual blitz of supplements is lacking. The Hellman interview is trite.

LE JOUR SE LÈVE

Marcel Carné; France 1939; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD: 91/89 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: documentary 'Last Assault of the Popular Front', restoration process featurette, censored scenes

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Supreme masterpiece of poetic realism, Marcel Carné and Jacques Prévert's *Le jour se lève* (if ever a film rated joint director/screenwriter auteurship, it's this one) was released in June 1939, less than three months before the outbreak of World War II. It's a film suffused with the zeitgeist, a bittersweet fatalism; the main characters, hero and villain alike, seem to move in a dream, progressing with



Going viral: *Shivers*

stoic fatalism towards their inescapable destinies. The parallel with pre-war France, awaiting defeat with mesmerised passivity, is inescapable, and indeed the film was later accused of having contributed to the military debacle of 1940. Carné disdainfully responded that the barometer should scarcely be blamed for the storm it forecasts.

The structure of the film is classic flashback. In the opening moments a man is shot, reeling mortally wounded down some tenement stairs. The killer barricades himself in his top-floor room while the police arrive and a crowd gathers below. Through the long night he recalls the events that led him to kill, until we return full circle to the shooting, this time seeing it from inside the room. As dawn breaks, a final shot is heard. The

first rays of the sun glimmer through a cloud of tear gas and an alarm clock breaks the silence.

Jean Gabin's role as the besieged killer marks the culmination of his pre-war persona of doomed working-class hero, following on from Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko*, Renoir's *La Bête humaine* and his previous Carné/Prévert outing, *Le Quai des brumes*. Arletty, felinely world-weary, and Jacqueline Laurent (Prévert's lover at the time), bruised and innocent, embody the contrasted women in his life. But the film is almost stolen by Jules Berry at his most suavely despicable as an exploitative animal trainer. The scenes between him and Gabin crackle with tension, each actor raising the other's game.

Disc: Laboratoires Eclair has done a superb restoration job on the texture of the film, and StudioCanal's release reintegrates two minutes of film excised by the Vichy authorities: scenes of *les flics* behaving with brutal stupidity, and a full-length nude shot of Arletty in the shower. DP Curt Courant and designer Alexandre Trauner (both Jewish) have their credits back.

THE MACK SENNETT COLLECTION VOLUME 1

Mack Sennett, Syd Chaplin, Del Lord, Edward Cline et al; USA 1909-33; Flicker Alley/Region 1/A DVD/Blu-ray; 1,005 minutes total; 1.33:1; Features: outtakes, radio shows, vintage TV programmes, documentary footage, original trailers, newsreel outtakes, annotated booklet

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Silent comedy has come to be reduced in the film-culture memory to the star-auteur filmographies of Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd, Langdon, Chase et al, when in fact the market then was thick with other figures, styles, imitators, producer-auteurs and one-offs, and this voluminous set of Mack Sennett's productions throws opens that window with brio.

With 50 films – 48 one- to three-reelers, plus two features, *Down on the Farm* (1920) and *The Extra Girl* (1923) – Sennett emerges as a do-everything magnate who worked with nearly every major name associated with the genre, and in nearly every capacity, from writer (his second credit, on D.W. Griffith's *The Curtain Pole*, from 1909) to actor, director, producer and composer. Without the emphasis on the evolution of a star's persona, you can see silent comedy's many other forms and manifestations, because Sennett had no one strategy or style, and would throw anything into the pot, in case it might be amusing. What you also get a handle on is the early emphasis, in the teens, on gag concepts rather than adroit execution – the idea of a pratfall or visual pun, performed with clownish vaudeville hyperbole, was sufficient.

Subtlety was a product of evolution, and Sennett's films get progressively funnier, even as they vary wildly due to the personnel involved and the apparently slapdash manner in which many were made. It's a vast potpourri, even if it represents a fraction of Sennett's output (more than 1,000 films), with a predictable profusion of farm scenarios (the rural audience was still huge, and loved comedies) and plenty of time spent with underhallowed comedic pioneers such as Mabel Normand, Ford Sterling and Vernon Dent, who all knew how to



Le jour se lève Jean Gabin's role as the besieged killer François marks the culmination of his pre-war persona of doomed working-class hero



Television

FARGO

USA 2014; 20th Century Fox/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 540 minutes; 16:9; Features: audio commentaries on some episodes by Noah Hawley, Billy Bob Thornton, Allison Tolman, deleted scenes, featurettes ('This Is a True Story', 'Welcome to Bemidji', 'Shades of Green')

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Every truly original work of art is also a piece of criticism – Ruskin wrote that. Alternatively, I just made it up. Truth is a fluid concept in the context of *Fargo*, both the FX TV series and the 1996 Coen brothers film, kicking off as they do with the unsustainable claim that “This is a true story” (“At the request of the survivors, the names have been changed. Out of respect for the dead, the rest has been told exactly as it occurred”).

News of a planned television series was greeted with scepticism – the sceptics including many of the people involved in making it, as they testify in the featurettes accompanying this release. The film's appeal rested on some superb acting and on its absolute freshness of setting and tone: an expletive-ridden *noir* narrative of spiralling violence pitched against a background of anachronistic decency, spoken in the charmingly odd Minnesota dialect, a quasi-Scandinavian lilt punctuated with gollies and you-betchas, and set in a blank, icebound landscape. How would a spin-off recapture that? And what would it be? Sequel? Reboot? Expanded retelling?

Arguably, it's all three. The central plot is kinda the same: nebbish gets in over his head with criminals; moral police-lady doggedly solves crime. The protagonists are versions of the film's – Martin Freeman's Lester Nygaard takes off from William H. Macy's Jerry Lundegaard, Allison Tolman's police officer Molly Solverson from Frances McDormand's Marge Gunderson – and one of the subplots turns out to be sparked by events in the film. Noah Hawley's script lets slip a sly glee in borrowing from the film, and from pretty much every other Coen brothers picture – orthodox Jews straight out of *A Serious Man* (2009), a boneheaded personal trainer out of *Burn After Reading* (2008), and so on. But with nine hours of screen time to play with, he also manages to deepen and criticise what he's taken. He makes you aware that Jerry and Marge were not actual characters so much as well-acted realisations of ideas – Jerry was the idea of desperation, Marge the idea of dedication to the job.

Hawley and his actors give context and depth to Lester's desperation – nagging wife, smug brother and the constant monstrous efforts of repression which make possible that Minnesota cheerfulness: when he beats his wife to death with a hammer, he utters little moans that combine ecstasy with apology: “Aw jeez... I'm sorry, I'm sorry.” Molly's dedication springs from family tradition but also from a genuine warmth in her relationships with colleagues, even her inept chief Bill (Bob Odenkirk), with his inability to grasp the notion of real evil.

Cinema audiences are shut in a darkened room, time and cash invested; you can put them through the mangle. Television audiences, on the other hand, have to be wooed back. *Fargo* the series has episodes of extreme violence – at times I realised that the pleasure I was feeling



Fargo It winds up the tension in painful ways – not just who's going to get killed, but how far will the increasingly immoral Lester go

was mostly relief when threatened violence was averted, or at any rate not shown. It winds up the tension in painful ways – not just who's going to get killed but how far will the increasingly amoral Lester go. But it also has bags of charm: Molly's tentative romance with Colin Hanks's inept Duluth policeman Gus Grimly; Keith Carradine's gentle, dignified performance as her cop-turned-diner-owner dad (set it alongside his Wild Bill Hickok in *Deadwood*); most of all, it has Billy Bob Thornton's demonic hitman, Lorne Malvo.

Lorne, in his invulnerability and mock Cormac McCarthy nihilism (“It's a red tide, Lester, this life of ours. The shit they make us eat”) resembles Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*. But Anton was all fate and relentlessness; Lorne, with his flashes of academic curiosity (“I'm a student of institutions”), his delight in making people squirm, his grin, is exciting and fun. Some of that excitement dissipates at the end, when the rush to wrap things up leads to a flattening of the characters. All in all, though, some of the best fun I've had in front of a TV in a long time.

Disc: Excellent picture and sound. The ‘making of’ featurettes are quite enjoyable, though the deleted scenes add little. In the episode commentaries, Thornton claims that he was misled into thinking he'd be acting with Morgan Freeman; I want that to be true.

THE HISTORY MAN

BBC; UK 1981; Simply Media/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 209 minutes; 4:3

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

This adaptation of Malcolm Bradbury's 1975 campus novel was a sensation in 1981, partly because of a then unusual degree of nudity but mostly because of Antony Sher's dynamic performance as the Machiavellian, radically chic sociology professor Howard Kirk, bedding every available woman and cunningly stirring up a political controversy to raise his profile. Thanks to spot-on casting (Michael Hordern, Paul Brooke, Isla Blair) and production design – interesting to realise that even in 1981 the tank-tops and Afghan coats of 1972 looked like period dress – it has worn well; and it is rigorously depressing in its picture of the corruptibility of the human spirit.

Bradbury's novel was explicitly concerned with the surface of things – no points of view, no inner psychology – which you might think made it ideal fodder for TV; but the novel enriched the experience through description and argument, and the television version doesn't have anything to put in its place. The camerawork reveals the influence of *Tinker, Tailor* a couple of years earlier, and Christopher Hampton's smart dialogue now sounds unnecessarily wordy.

Disc: Perfectly OK transfer; no extras. Ⓢ

New releases

 underplay (Mack Swain, Chester Conklin, James Finlayson etc, not so much). Sennett did not aim high: the use of the rather pitiful Ben Turpin looks today to be almost exploitative, and just as *Bangville Police* (1913) was a parody of *The Lonedale Operator* (1911), the Turpin vehicle *The Dare-Devil* (1923) ripped off Chaplin's *Behind the Screen* (1916) but with much wilder stunts. *Mabel and Fatty Adrift* (1916) remains deft, and climaxes with a flurry of chase chaos (Sennett's films are always funniest when things move very quickly), while the Eddie Cline-directed *Hearts and Flowers* (1919) may be the loopyest and most unpredictable film in the set, a romantic crisscross with a language and cockeyed personality all its own. The set finishes up in the sound era, with W.C. Fields's *The Fatal Glass of Beer* (1933), a classic of its own peculiar kind. **Disc:** Beautiful digital restorations of everything, and supplemented to the hilt, with stray footage, outtakes, alternate scenes and multimedia ephemera surrounding Sennett deep into the 60s, even after his death.

SHIVERS

David Cronenberg; Canada 1975; Arrow Films./Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 88 minutes; 1.78:1; Features: booklet with essays and stills, documentaries, video essay by Caelum Vatnsdal

Reviewed by Charlie Fox

David Cronenberg's directorial debut is a far more cerebral and unsettling operation than any gnarly account of its sexually-transmitted-plague scenario might promise. All kinds of anxieties are circulating through this pulp possession tale, and its grotesque surface masks its subtextual density and fearful prescience.

In a secluded tower block, a mysterious Reichian experiment sires some phallic proto-*Alien* parasites; infection spreads, transforming the inhabitants into deviant ghouls. A lone doctor attempts to escape into the labyrinth of sterile rooms, while the narrative degenerates into a sequence of uncanny convulsions and sculptural tableaux.

On its release, French critics took the film – originally purveyed in North America under the schlock title *They Came from Within* – as a delirious howl of anti-bourgeois revulsion, seemingly intended as a public call to murder and act out malevolent carnal fantasies. Though everything is drenched in the ambient gloom of European chamber drama, Cronenberg's chill tone and capacity to make every scene writhe with unspeakable ambiguities mean that this is only one of many possible dissections of its contents. Contrariwise, you can claim that it's an allegory about the dangers of sexual decadence in the 70s which imagines that the bodily fallout will take the form of a fatal virus and, consequently, see it as an uncanny forecast of near-future horrors.

Almost immediately you know the disease will triumph: the film's real fascination lies in watching its careful progress. Additional uneasy thrills come from the doped vacancy of the anonymous Canadian cast, who behave as if they're lost in a promotional film that might at any moment dissolve into softcore pornography. Meanwhile Cronenberg finds cavities inside horror's routine obsessions – remote



Suzuki method: *Youth of the Beast*

communities and perverse science – and injects them with raw menace. This is not just cause for gore but an expression of how our more obscure internal certainties – home, desire, consciousness itself – are at risk of profound disturbances. By the climax, a slow-motion kiss is as disquieting as anything you might find in your nightmares.

Disc: Deluxe restoration with a feast of extras.

SOFIA'S LAST AMBULANCE

Ilian Metev; Bulgaria 2012; Second Run/Region 0 DVD; 77 minutes; 1.85:1 anamorphic; Features: interview, 'Goleshovo' short film, Ilian Metev and sound recordist Tom Kirk in conversation, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

A synopsis of the opening scene of Ilian Metev's documentary – an ambulance arrives, a brief exchange ("What's happened?" "It doesn't look good") and the subsequent temporary patching-up and transportation to hospital – would suggest very familiar territory indeed. But Metev sets out his conceptual stall from the start: his camera remains on the paramedics, and there are no shots of the patient at all. In other words, like Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's *Zidane* from a few years back, he's more interested in the bits that conventional films (fiction and non-fiction alike) typically cut out in the interests of beefing up the drama: the conversations between emergency call-outs, the journeys themselves (especially a lengthy episode in which the crew get lost in a remote, poorly lit backwater), and so on.

Not that this isn't formally gripping in its own right. There's no contextual voiceover or onscreen text, but as we listen to the numerous chats between the crew (doctor Krassi, nurse Mila and driver Plamen), it gradually becomes clear that their ambulance isn't quite the last one in Sofia, though these vehicles are distinctly thin on the ground in a national capital housing 2 million people. Another line, "I'm the only resuscitator in all of Sofia," speaks volumes too, as does Plamen's casual aside, heard during a heated encounter following an accident, that he also drives a taxi.

Corners are cut in front of our eyes, because the time- and equipment-strapped crew have no choice – and we feel every minute of a temporary communication breakdown with HQ. A breakneck drive across Sofia ("Plamen, did you sit on the adrenaline?") would break all sorts of NHS guidelines (as would the chain-smoking en route) but here it's logistically essential. An encounter with a drug addict hooked on heavily adulterated heroin becomes a metaphor for the

crew's own struggles with limited resources, as does a brief stop to scrump some low-hanging pears. Much of the time the dashboard-mounted camera scrutinises individual faces at length: even when the medics fall silent, their palpable exhaustion could hardly be more eloquent.

Disc: Allowances have to be made for production conditions but picture and sound are fine.

Extras include a booklet reminiscence by editor Betina Ip about the challenges of assembling a coherent film from two years' worth of material.

YOUTH OF THE BEAST

Suzuki Seijun; Japan 1963; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 NTSC DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 94 minutes; 2.35:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: Tony Rayns appreciation, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

At base, Suzuki Seijun's bafflingly titled high-powered gangster thriller is a familiar 'servant of two masters' story that's seen service from Carlo Goldoni's *Il servitore di due padroni* to Richard Bean's *One Man, Two Guvnors* via Kurosawa Akira's *Yojimbo* and Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars*. But it would not, to put it mildly, be hard to distinguish Suzuki's work from theirs.

Although this was Suzuki's 28th feature in a wildly prolific career that had lasted just seven years, it was the first of his Nikkatsu-backed melodramas to feature what became recognised (albeit far from immediately) as his characteristic approach. It's wildly over-composed and colour-coordinated (even the smoke billowing out of a wrecked car is a fetching reddish-brown), its style and substance virtually indivisible and equally exhilarating. If it's not quite as out-there as what came later (1966's *Tokyo Drifter*, 1967's *Branded to Kill*), that's because Suzuki hadn't yet teamed up with like-minded designer Kimura Takeo, but there's still more than enough here to betray a deeply individual eye. In particular, vivid splashes of red (blood, telephones, clothing) are rarely accidental, something foreshadowed by a crimson camellia in an otherwise black-and-white opening scene.

In terms of content, Suzuki doesn't so much undermine conventional gangster-flick clichés as turn them up to 11, creating a powerfully satiric effect in the process – he even contrives to have one of the rival gangs hold its meetings in a cinema, the self-consciously hard-boiled dialogue playing out against a backdrop of projected black-and-white thrillers. In this respect, regular Suzuki male lead Shishido Jo could hardly be more perfectly cast as the ex-cop turned avenging antihero; his surgically enhanced cheekbones add to the pervasive impression of something slightly off-kilter, a feeling enhanced further by his improvised methods of interrogation – for instance, briefly setting fire to a luckless interviewee's hair with the aid of an aerosol spray. The BBFC would undoubtedly have turned this down in 1963 for the sexualised violence alone, but today's 15 certificate suggests they've also recognised the film's essential absurdity. It's hard to believe that it's over half a century old.

Disc: Picture and sound are impeccable. Hefty appreciations-cum-context-setters appear on the disc (by S&S's Tony Rayns) and in the booklet (Frederick Veith and Phil Kaffen). 

Lost and found

THE DRIVER'S SEAT (AKA IDENTIKIT)

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

The circus surrounding Elizabeth Taylor's private life overshadowed one of the boldest performances of her career

Reviewed by Simon McCallum

"I am desolate," Elizabeth Taylor confided to producer Franco Rossellini when she arrived at Rome's Fiumicino airport for the first day of filming on *The Driver's Seat* in July 1973. News of Taylor's separation from Richard Burton had broken the previous day, so cast and crew forgave the 41-year-old star for the five-hour delay with a standing ovation; but her misery proved omnipresent, bleeding into the boldest, strangest yet least seen performance of her career.

Boasting a notable literary pedigree, *The Driver's Seat* was based on Muriel Spark's 1970 novella, a 'metaphysical shocker' since nominated for the Lost Man Booker Prize. This peculiar tale is told from the skewed perspective of Lise, a lonely office worker in an unnamed northern European city. Lise transforms herself into a garishly dressed seductress and flies south on a self-destructive romantic odyssey, her erratic behaviour reflecting her deteriorating mental state. It's death she wants – not sex.

Taylor's casting was music to Spark's ears. "I cannot tell you how pleased and flattered I am," Taylor wrote to her. "I shall do my very best to live up to your faith in my portrayal." The star's first movie with no US backing, filmed in Rome and Munich, was another step into the unknown in the wild period when she cast off the shackles of the studio system with unabashed glee.

Production company Rizzoli Film assembled a formidable team under director Giuseppe Patroni Griffi. A Neapolitan of aristocratic descent, Griffi was unfazed by the Burton-Taylor circus. He was joined by cinematographer Vittorio Storaro and art director Mario Ceroli, who had both worked him before on *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1971). Composer Franco Mannino contributed a spare, unsettling piano score.

Though the adaptation was co-credited to Griffi and Raffaele La Capria, Taylor announced to reporters that "we are shooting it differently, without a proper script". Critic Donald Spoto was not the first to draw hasty conclusions, later writing that the film "makes perfect sense when seen – just as it was made – as a veiled piece of autobiography", and going so far as to suggest that Taylor was "improvising her way through a kind of confessional memoir she virtually wrote and directed". Taylor's distress undoubtedly enriched her disturbing portrayal of Lise, but in crediting so lazily her real-life psychodrama many critics missed the point: this was a daring and unusually faithful adaptation of a challenging literary source – right down to the hideous wardrobe.

Among many outbursts, Lise flies into a rage when a sales assistant offers her a stain-resistant



On the edge: Elizabeth Taylor as Lise in Muriel Spark's metaphysical shocker *The Driver's Seat*

It was a step into the unknown in the wild period when Taylor cast off the shackles of the studio system with unabashed glee

dress for her trip, while a neatly prescient airport scene anticipates 21st-century security paranoia as she barks at suspicious guards ("This may look like a purse but actually it's a bomb"). *Variety's* bemused reviewer noted that "it will be her temper tantrums that could make the film interesting to diehard Taylor fans", but these high-camp histrionics are true to Spark's study of a psyche in meltdown.

Unfolding partly in flashback as police investigate Lise's fate, her Roman holiday is peppered with odd encounters. Ian Bannen is

a macrobiotic health nut insistent on his daily orgasm. "When I diet, I diet. And when I orgasm, I orgasm," snaps Lise, rejecting his advances; "I don't believe in mixing the two cultures." She sends off a lascivious mechanic (Guido Mannari), and befriends kindly Mrs Fiedke (Mona Washbourne), whose disturbed nephew (Maxence Mailfort) could be the ideal 'boyfriend' for Lise.

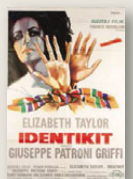
Andy Warhol appears in two (dubbed) scenes as an English lord, in Rome to meet a Middle Eastern king fleeing civil war. With Burton still in Rome filming *The Voyage* with Sophia Loren, an anguished Taylor confided in Warhol; their friendship was tested, however, when she caught him taping the conversation.

The gala world premiere of *The Driver's Seat* took place in Monte Carlo on 20 May 1974, in aid of the Monaco Red Cross. The \$500-a-head event, hosted by Princess Grace and Prince Rainier and attended by Taylor, Warhol and Salvador Dalí, stole the limelight from the Cannes Film Festival, which had snubbed the picture. The audience was reportedly stunned.

Avco Embassy picked up the US rights in early 1975 but *The Driver's Seat* barely saw the light of day, failing entirely to secure a UK release. In Italy it reverted to its original title *Identikit* and elsewhere resurfaced as *Blood Games* or *Psychotic*. Legend has it that Taylor tried to buy up all prints. Aside from a rare screening at the National Film Theatre in 1990, the curious have had to make do with a bootleg Region 1 DVD, its washed-out transfer an affront to Storaro's haunting imagery.

We should not forget that some critics were mesmerised by the film, while acknowledging that it was a hard sell even for Taylor, after a string of out-there roles from *Boom!* (1968) to *Zee and Co.* (1972). *The Driver's Seat* is a more nuanced, fully realised work – no mere footnote in an extraordinary life and career. **S**

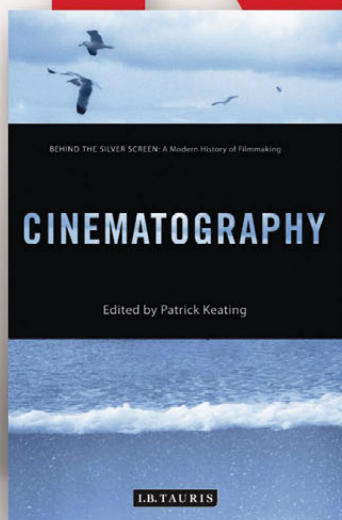
WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



'Quite possibly one of the best films Elizabeth Taylor has ever appeared in... Taylor, under Griffi's firm direction, gives a beautifully controlled and hypnotic performance.'
Hollywood Reporter, Dec 1975

'The Driver's Seat is a strange, morbid but intensely fascinating psychological study of a woman going mad that provides Elizabeth Taylor with her most colourful and demanding role in years. She meets the challenge with imperial efficiency.'
Daily News, Oct 1975

Read



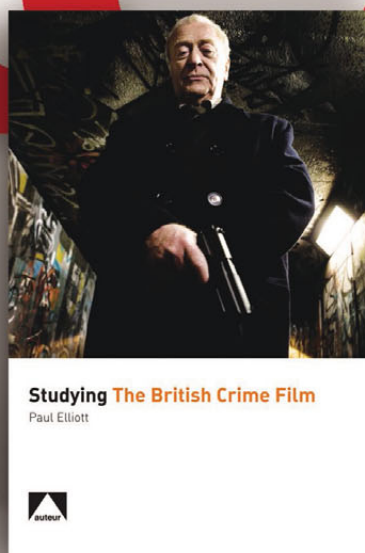
CINEMATOGRAPHY

Behind the Silver Screen: A Modern History of Filmmaking

Edited by Patrick Keating; I.B. Tauris; 224 pp; hardback, £56.00, ISBN 9781784530181; paperback, £14.99, ISBN 9781784530198. How does a film come to look the way it does? What influence does a film's look have on our reaction to it?

Cinematography's role as a science and an art is often forgotten. *Cinematography* examines and highlights the art of the cinematographer and provides the first comprehensive overview of how the field has rapidly evolved, from silent films to digital imagery. It shows how it has been influenced by both technological advances and trends in the movie industry, whether big-budget blockbuster or indie film, with detailed views of films and profiles of major cinematographers. This is a valuable behind-the-scenes look at cinematography and a stirring celebration of the artform.

<http://bit.ly/1r1yq0m>



STUDYING THE BRITISH CRIME FILM

By Paul Elliott; Auteur Publishing; 176pp, paperback, illustrated, £18.99, ISBN 9781906733742

British cinema has long been obsessed with crime and the criminal, starting with 1905's *Rescued by Rover*, a fast-paced tale of kidnap, and the first British sound film, *Blackmail* (1929). *Studying the British Crime Film* looks closely at a variety of films relating to different aspects of criminality, including gangland culture from *Brighton Rock* (1947) to *Essex Boys* (2000), the heist film from *The League of Gentlemen* (1960) to *Sexy Beast* (2000), the post-war serial killer of *10 Rillington Place* (1971) and the underworld of Britain today in *London to Brighton* (2006). There are in-depth readings of the films under discussion and the reader is guided through the processes of studying British cinema in terms of both genre and nationality.

<http://bit.ly/1DsY9GR>



SCI-FI: DAYS OF FEAR AND WONDER

Edited by James Bell, BFI, 160pp, paperback, illustrated, £16.99, ISBN 9781844578610

Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder charts a course through the other worlds, future visions and altered states of sci-fi film and television, taking us from the magical invention of early cinema and onwards past the flying saucers, forbidden planets and Martian invaders of 1950s Cold War sci-fi and the adventures in space and time of Doctor Who. We journey deep into the virtual realities of cyberspace and through the nightmarish visions of future dystopias, meeting advanced artificial intelligences, biological mutations and alien lifeforms, and on to the special-effects-laden, galaxy-spanning entertainments of today. Through a range of lavishly illustrated new essays *Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder* shows that sci-fi is as much about ideas as spectacle, and how it expresses our sense of fear and wonder like no other genre.

<http://bit.ly/1r1KjTO>



MARNIE

By Murray Pomerance, BFI Film Classics Series, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, 96pp, paperback, illustrated, £12.99, ISBN 9781844576548

A thrilling tale of anxiety and moral extremity, *Marnie* (1964) cemented Alfred Hitchcock's reputation as a master of suspense and the visual form. Murray Pomerance weaves critical discussion together with production history to reveal Marnie as a woman in flight from her self, her past, her love and the watching eyes of others. Challenging many received opinions – including claims of technical sloppiness and the proposal that Marnie's wedding night is a 'rape scene' – Pomerance sheds new light on a film that can often be difficult to understand and accept on its own terms. Original and stimulating, this BFI Film Classic identifies *Marnie* as one of Hitchcock's masterpieces, highlights the film's philosophical and psychological sensitivity, and reveals its sharp-eyed understanding of American society and its mores.

<http://tinyurl.com/mmr7pbo>



Hard sell: Raymond Durnat was an advocate for a wide variety of films, including Jay Lewis's offbeat Brit-pop movie *Live Now, Pay Later*

ADVENTURES IN THE SCREEN TRADE

THE ESSENTIAL RAYMOND DURGNAT

Edited by Henry K. Miller; BFI/Palgrave
Macmillan; 256pp, hardback, £65;
paperback, £25.99; ISBN 9781844574513

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

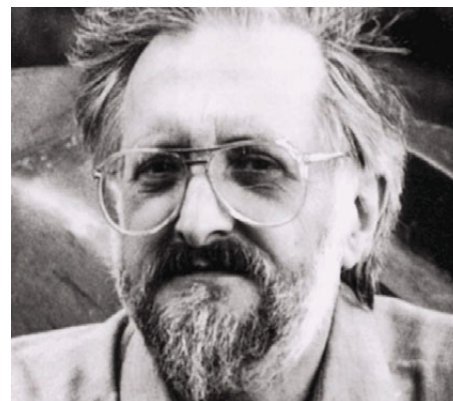
Cutting to the chase, this is the most welcome film book of the year – and one of the most fascinating. It's doubtful that British readers have ever thought of any film critic as 'essential' – as distinct from fashionable, entertaining or stupid – but the ultra-prolific Raymond Durnat (1932-2002) came closer than anyone else in the last 50 years to earning the label. And Henry K. Miller's cleverly edited selection from Durnat's writings gets as close as any book of 250 pages could to capturing the 'essence' of Durnat's thought and practice. My only quibble is that the book's general high-mindedness doesn't quite do justice to Durnat's championing of Z movies. The inclusion of, say, his review of *Evils of Chinatown* (aka *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, directed by Albert Zugsmith) from *Films & Filming* would have sorted that out.

Full disclosure: I belong to the generation which discovered Durnat in the early 1960s,

soon after he began reviewing films and writing essays for *Films & Filming* and just before he began co-editing *Motion* and published his *Nouvelle Vague* lexicon and the seminal *Motion* 'Companion to Violence and Sadism in the Cinema'. Durnat was formative reading for me and no doubt for other movie brats who encountered him in their early-to-mid-teens: erudite, allusive, promiscuous in his enthusiasms, fiercely anti-puritan and anti-censorship, and very different in tone and assumptions from the stuff you could read at the time in Ian Cameron's magazine *Movie* and the BFI magazines *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Sight & Sound*, never mind the UK's newspapers and weeklies. It wasn't just that Durnat found interest in such a wide range of films – from an offbeat Brit-pop movie like Jay Lewis's *Live Now, Pay Later* to a crypto-gay Academy Cinema release like Giuseppe Patroni Griffi's *Il mare*, to name just two forgotten gems – but also that he managed to discuss them in specifically filmic/visual terms without forgetting their place in the larger worlds of social commentary, politics, philosophy and psycho-sexuality. Durnat simply had more ideas to the square inch of page than other writers on film.

Soon after moving to the US for the first in a string of university teaching posts, Durnat took stock in a pseudonymous review of his own

book *Sexual Alienation in the Cinema*, published in *Film Comment* in 1975 and reprinted here. His self-assessment is quite harsh: "He has always given the impression of being a loner. He has never mastered the art of writing as if he's by the reader's side, thinking his thoughts along with him. He probably doesn't realize such a tone is possible [...]. Some writers are guides, others are adversaries. Durnat belongs to the latter persuasion." That was written at a time when Theory was consolidating its short-lived hold on film studies courses in America, having



The reel deal: Raymond Durnat

already conquered *Cahiers du cinéma* and been imported into the UK by the BFI's Education Department and its house-journal *Screen*; Durnat would have felt increasingly embattled, although he didn't publish his generally devastating critique (also reprinted here) of the book which kickstarted Theory in the UK, Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, until some years later, in *Film Reader* in 1982.

Never a mere contrarian, Durnat certainly was a perennial oppositionist. In the late 1950s, working on a sprawling thesis under Thorold Dickinson at the Slade (and with a brief, unhappy stint in the writing pool at Associated British Pictures under his belt), he stood against the Griersonian documentary tradition in British cinema. In the early 1960s, as his published writing began to claim attention, he stood against the 'puritan' ideology of *Sight & Sound* (then under Penelope Houston's editorship) and its inverted twin, the reflex auteurism of the *Movie* critics. By the late 1960s, having largely abandoned the reviewing of new releases to concentrate

Durnat was erudite, allusive, promiscuous in his enthusiasms, and fiercely anti-puritan and anti-censorship

on writing books, he began championing 'underground' cinema and became for a time the chairman of the London Film-makers' Co-op. The escape to America followed, along with the slow-burn resistance to the fashion of thinking about cinema in terms snatched from structural linguistics and Metzian semiotics. All of these oppositions are well represented in Miller's anthology, reanimating debates which will leave younger readers pie-eyed at the discovery that British film culture has such a history of snobbery, blindness and intellectual bullying.

I didn't know until reading this book that Durnat spent several years under R.D. Laing's analysis at the Tavistock Clinic, and imagine that the sparkiness and unpredictability of his critical insights had quite a lot to do with what Laing called his "wild" state of mind. Charting Durnat's intellectual evolution and wrangling a vast output into manageable form, Miller sensibly returns several times to the man's recurrent obsessions – Michael Powell, Godard, Jeff Keen – and in the process anthologises some of Durnat's most memorable lines: "Jeff Keen makes films on shoestrings and then blows them up to 8mm" ... "Godard keeps babbling on about the world being absurd because he can't keep an intellectual hard-on long enough to probe for any responsive warmth" ... "Powell lived in a class and a country which suspects, undermines, is embarrassed by, emotion". But such lines are ultimately fringe benefits in a book which stakes out Durnat's undisciplined claim to his own grand theory of the ways we understand and respond to movies – sometimes at odds with the filmmakers' professed intentions. If anything can bring back long, hard looks at movies, this will. 📖

THE GEORGE KUCHAR READER

Edited by Andrew Lampert, Primary Information, 336pp, \$27.50, ISBN 9780985136475

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

An irreplaceable voice was silenced when George Kuchar died in September 2011 – a persistently yammering voice with a soggy Bronx brogue. The ingenious, perverse homemade 8mm epics that he made in the late 1950s with his twin brother Mike – still alive and working – were silent, but even the intertitles showed an already inimitable prose style, all alliteration and adjectives from B-movie adverts. The brothers' (way) uptown *art brut* was embraced by the downtown underground/avant-garde set, and in time they began working separately – George's signature film being perhaps his 1966 *Hold Me While I'm Naked*. An instructor at the San Francisco Art Institute from 1971, George kept up a steady flow of work in 16mm and later video. This was produced both outside and inside the classroom, in which, to hear him tell it, polymorphous perversion was practically a requisite.

And tell it he does in *The George Kuchar Reader*. For those of us who have dearly missed hearing regularly from George, what a treat is the arrival of this beefy tome, which should optimally be imagined as being read aloud. Per the introduction by editor Andrew Lampert, infused with the spirit of Kucharian hoopla, the *Reader* is "a crazy quilt attempt to encapsulate a hyperactive existence of creative commotion", and "an acutely self-aware portrayal created by a person who recognized that he was a real-life character".

Put plainly, the *Reader* is a collection of ephemera relating to Kuchar's life and art – nearly inextricable, as the above statement notes. It is arranged roughly chronologically, except when it isn't. The character who emerges is, like all of us, rife with contradictions. George, whose early output was a formative influence on a young John Waters, is widely regarded as practising an aesthetic of total, searing artifice – "the romance of blond wigs and formica kitchen tables," as a letter from one admirer puts it. (He is also said to have influenced Ryan Trecartin, but we won't hold that against him.) The *Reader* reconfirms, however, the degree to which commiseration with the natural world was essential to George's art – there is, for example, much material relating to his regular visits to El Reno, Oklahoma, in order to observe extreme weather patterns, the source of his lovely *Weather Diary* videos. (Also interesting is George's recounting of a storm that occurs when screening these films at a Flaherty Film Seminar, where he is beset by PC interlopers. A gay man with an almost spiritual interest in transgressive sexuality, George self-identified as a political conservative.)

A handful of George's sketches of landscapes, leaves and rock formations are also included. A graduate of New York's School of Industrial

Art (now the High School of Art and Design) along with his brother – whose fantastical homoerotic illustrations beg for a volume of their own – and their first muse, Donna Kerness, George was a talented draftsman. Several of his narrative comics have been compiled in one place here – I am especially fond of his hysterical mini-biography of fellow vision-beset artist H.P. Lovecraft, which first appeared in Bill Griffith and Art Spiegelman's *Arcade* anthology in 1975. Kuchar may be accused of mocking his subject, but I don't believe this is so. As is extensively documented in the *Reader*, Kuchar was himself susceptible to otherworldly visitations, including a rash of UFO sightings surrounding the illness and decease of his beloved dog Bockko. (The book's one full-colour fold-out is a painting of Bockko with thighs splayed.)

The cover of the *Reader*, which shows George next to a man-sized dummy Santa Claus, reaffirms the popular impression of the author as an overgrown kid who has somehow cheated adulthood in order to freely indulge his myriad obsessions into late middle age – an impression George, who writes incessantly of bowel movements, did much to foster. This is the "real-life character" whom Lampert's introduction refers to, but quite another George Kuchar comes through in the book's final section, a compilation of his correspondences with Kerness that begins with hand-written letters dated 1960 and ends with emails (and one last hand-written letter from El Reno) sent during the final year of his life, in which George Kuchar peeps out from behind his creation 'George Kuchar', speaking plainly and very movingly of sex, love, art and Sal Mineo, all of which preoccupy him to the end. "Let's hope I reach a new understanding by breaking with so many rules," he writes of this sudden candour in the face of mortality – and this might also be taken for an artistic credo. 📖

One view of Kuchar is of an overgrown kid who has cheated adulthood in order to indulge his obsessions into late middle age



Wild child: George Kuchar

LONDON'S HOLLYWOOD

The Gainsborough Studio in the Silent Years

By Gary Chapman; Edditt Publishing; hardback, £27, ISBN 9781909230132; paperback, £14.99, ISBN 9781909230101

Reviewed by Nathalie Morris

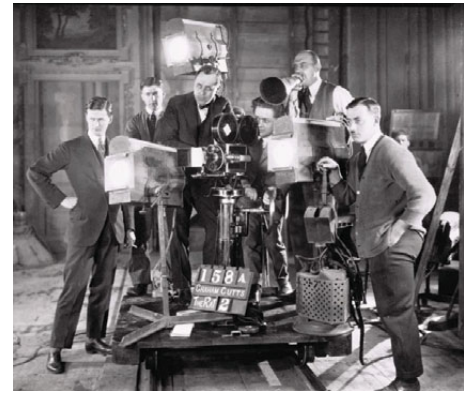
A former power station by the Regent's Canal in North London was an inauspicious setting for what would become the most important British studio of the 1920s. Dubbed "Hollywood by the canal", the studio that eventually became best known as Gainsborough hosted an impressive array of British and American Jazz Age talent between its development in the wake of the Armistice and a devastating fire that temporarily put it out of commission just as the talkies were taking hold.

The studio was the product of the post-war expansion of the American company Famous Players-Lasky, which formed a British arm in the spring of 1919. FPL acquired the site and set about creating a modern and well-equipped studio facility that even had the ability to dissipate the pervasive London fog that disrupted film production on a regular basis. Personnel were brought over from America, with an energetic production schedule lined up in 1920. Within two years, however, FPL's British programme was struggling. The company began letting out studio space to producers such as George Pearson, Herbert Wilcox and

Michael Balcon before withdrawing from UK production entirely, eventually selling up to Balcon's Gainsborough Pictures in 1926.

Gary Chapman's book chronicles, film by film, both the titles produced at the studio from 1920 onwards and those made by the company Gainsborough Pictures (which was founded in 1924), even when these were shot elsewhere. This approach helps build a sense of continuity across projects and careers, and gives an impression of the wider production scene in and around London during the period. Chapman also takes a brief diversion even further away from the studio itself to cover the post-Gainsborough career of the company's most important early director – not Hitchcock, who famously started his career at the studio, but the pudgy prodigy's mentor-turned-rival, Graham Cutts. Cutts's career has long been due for a major reassessment and Chapman makes steps towards this with a passionate defence of the director and his work, citing films such as *Woman to Woman* (1923) and *The Rat* (1925) as evidence of his genuine skill and innovation as a director.

Another strength of the book is its highlighting of other personnel and roles, such as costume designer Marcelle de Saint Martin, who for a time headed up the costume department at FPL's British arm, and continuity supervisor Renie Marrison, who worked with both Cutts and Hitchcock. Drawing on interviews and articles from the trade and fan press of the time, Chapman provides some fascinating material on these two branches of film work at this time. He also offers useful and informative pocket biographies of the



The Rat (1925) shooting at Gainsborough Studio

host of other directors, writers, cameramen and actors who crossed the studio's threshold during the 1920s. Occasionally the book would benefit from a more objective approach to some of its source material, more citations (especially when drawing on memoirs and secondary sources) and further information on whether or not films survive, are complete and have been viewed by the author. But these reservations aside, the book is a detailed and thorough study of what Chapman astutely deems "a microcosm of the evolution of the British film industry during the silent era". It provides valuable and enjoyable studies of a huge range of films while placing the studio within the context of issues affecting British filmmaking across this period. As such, it makes a worthwhile addition to the growing body of research on British silent cinema. **S**

70X70

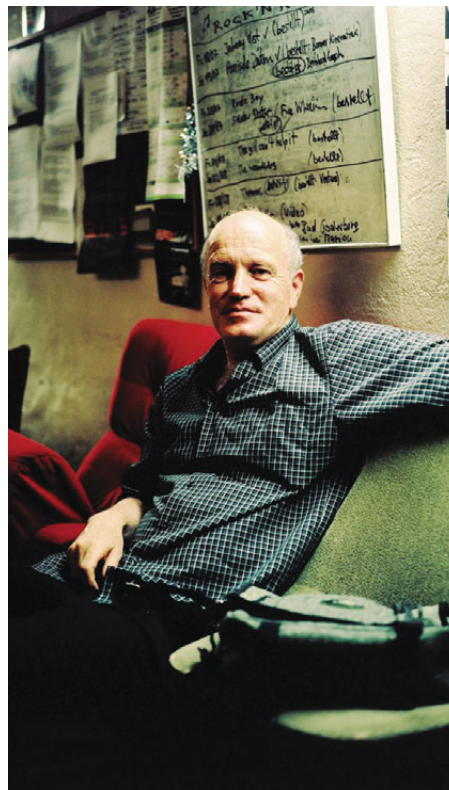
Unlicensed Preaching: A Life Unpacked in 70 Films

By Iain Sinclair, Volcano Publishing, 166pp, hardback, £25, ISBN 9780992643454

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

Blame it in on the quick-step, concussive prose that led James Wood to call him "a demented magus of the sentence", or his background as an antiquarian bookseller trading in and talking up literary recessives, to say nothing of his role at Albion Village Press publishing off-piste poets – but it's often forgotten that Iain Sinclair is a movie man. He was making films back in the early 1960s, studied at London's School of Film Technique (now called the London Film School), writes in a style that owes as much to Godard as to the poet Charles Olson, and even contributed a volume on David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) to the BFI Modern Classics series.

"My discovery of London was the business of making journeys to find cinemas," he writes in *70x70*. It's a remarkable book, produced to mark a remarkable season staged to celebrate Sinclair's 70th birthday, in which the writer was asked to choose 70 films connected to his long and often centrifugal writing career. Generously illustrated (often with atmospheric autumnal imagery) and printed in landscape format (apt for this poet of topography), the volume brings together Sinclair's essays about each film, edited transcripts of the introductions, on-stage discussions and Q&As, as well as a passionately lyrical reflection by curator Gareth Evans about the relationship between place and cinephilia.



Movie man: Iain Sinclair

Sinclair was making films back in the early 60s and writes in a style that owes as much to Godard as to Charles Olson

Indeed place is one of the key motifs throughout. Many of the film venues were unusual: Godard's *British Sounds* (aka *See You at Mao*, 1969) at a TV repair shop off Brick Lane; Jarman's *The Last of England* (1987) at King's College Anatomy Lecture Theatre. Others – such as The Wapping Project, Riverside Studios and The Horse Hospital – face the threat of, or are victims of, the capital's increasingly punitive property market. The book joins recent works – Tacita Dean's *FILM*, Stephen Barber's *Abandoned Images: Film and Film's End* – that chart the disappearance of a particular era of filmgoing culture.

There's at least as much mirth as melancholia here. The story is told of Waldemar Januszczak, then commissioning editor at Channel 4, coming into the editing suite where Chris Petit was finishing up *The Cardinal and the Corpse*, and saying, "I am probably the most intelligent man in Europe and I can't understand a word of this." At that stage he'd only seen the credits. Elsewhere, Paul Tickell, whose *Vessels of Wrath* was based on Sinclair's novel *Downriver*, recalls it being transmitted live on BBC2's *The Late Show*. "Is this an April Fools' joke?" asked the BBC Two controller Alan Yentob.

If it's a Festschrift, *70x70* is free of sentimentality and backslapping. One of the screenings – *In a Lonely Place* (1950) at the worker-unfriendly Curzon Soho – was canned because it fell during Living Wage Week. Others attracted barely any audiences. One transcript is only two paragraphs long because the recording battery ran out. The likes of Herzog and Fassbinder emerge as pivotal figures for their success at operating on the fly and for their ethos of ceaseless production. Sharp-witted, cussed and writhing with insights, *70x70* is a tribute that breathes fire. **S**



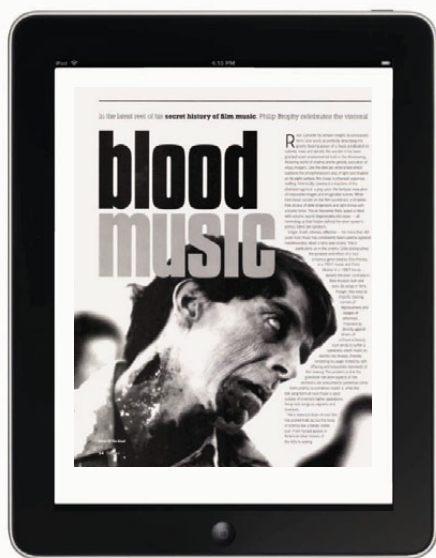
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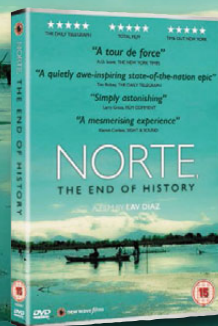
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READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

DON'T TRUST THOMSON

I don't believe that after their death we have to pretend someone was the greatest artist and most wonderful human being ever. But apart from sprinkling his assessment of Lauren Bacall's career ('Slim Pickings', *S&S*, October) with petty personal attacks (apparently she was a "social bore"), David Thomson again reveals his misogynistic bias, showing little understanding of women's roles on and off screen in the middle of the 20th century. Fine, Lauren Bacall was a limited actress (she'd be the first to say so), but so were plenty of other stars of the period whose careers thrived because they were cast in roles that made good use of their star appeal. Bacall projected sex appeal, smarts, wit and a confidence beyond her years. She was never a girl: she emerged as a fully formed woman who demanded to be taken as an equal. These qualities, and the fact that the camera adored her, made her a compelling and unique screen presence.

Thomson does not try to put her career in historical or sociological context. There is no mention that Bacall's career suffered because she was required to put her marriage and family first, as were so many women of the time. Bogart let her work only if it didn't interfere with his career and her duties as a wife. This limited the roles she could take and stunted her career just as it was about to flourish. By the time she tried to make a comeback, having lost her husband to cancer, female ideals had changed. The Hollywood landscape was now dominated by sexpots (Monroe), wholesome girls next door (Day) and pixies (Audrey Hepburn, Leslie Caron), leaving little room for the wisecracking screwball dames and femmes fatales of the 40s. Thomson blames her for being boring in 50s "good girl" roles, rather than blaming the writers or the studio for not giving her material which played to her strengths.

Thomson describes Bacall's combination of angular beauty and assertive sexuality as vampiric, casting this quintessentially Hawksian woman as a predatory ghoul. He can't even be bothered to assess her late career resurgence, when she appeared in the films of indie mavericks like Altman, Glazer and Von Trier rather than simply cashing pay-checks like many of her surviving contemporaries. He makes it sound as though she was washed up after her 40s rise to stardom, and that her late career triumphs are mere footnotes.

Thomson's nasty take on women has always rankled with me. In his *A Biographical Dictionary of Film* several actresses were chastised for losing their looks. Do we really need a film historian to support the view that female actors have passed their sell-by date once they mature and have lost their allure for him? I'm sure *Sight & Sound* could get someone more insightful to write about classic Hollywood. Karina Longworth shows up Thomson as a dinosaur in her podcast 'You Must Remember This', which deconstructs Hollywood myths with great insight and without mudslinging. **Boris Kossmehl** *London*

LETTER OF THE MONTH THE DISAPPEARING WOMAN



Spoiler alert: this letter reveals a *Gone Girl* twist I waited until after viewing the film to read Nick James's review of *Gone Girl* (*S&S*, November), upon which I was disappointed that the gender politics that have dominated and divided reaction to the film so far were not explored.

In the debate over whether it is a misogynist or a feminist film, I take the former view. Amy achieves dominance over men by making false allegations of physical and sexual abuse; the cornerstone of her plans is actually the male seed. Her constant assumption of the stereotypically oppressed female role, even to deceive, is surely at odds with claims Gillian Flynn has recently made about feminism.

James did touch on the Hitchcockian mode of the piece, which interested me: I found myself while in the cinema comparing *Gone Girl*'s trio of Nick, Amy and Margo, with *Vertigo*'s Scottie, Midge and Madeleine/Judy. Both Nick and Scottie fall in love with

quasi-fictional depictions of real people, and are subsequently framed for their death. Both then are haunted by a distorted, ghostly persona of their respective loves, while seeking counsel from the asexual (to them at least) forms of Margo and Midge, the female voices of reason. Both films stretch believability, but while *Hitchcock* retains verisimilitude within context, *Fincher* drifts into implausibility, leaving gaping plot holes. Whereas Amy sheds and reconstructs her own personae voluntarily, *Vertigo* offers a forced, subjugated female identity transformation: it's interesting to consider what the reaction might be if it was released today, even though its appreciation and reputation have been higher.

Also, at the risk of sounding pedantic, Amy's disappearance occurs on her and Nick's fifth wedding anniversary, not, as the review stated, his birthday.

Richard Pask *Cardiff*

TRAILER TRASHING

Throughout most screenings at this year's LFF, the Festival trailer was followed by another for the BFI's sci-fi season. No complaints – blockbuster programmes need to be promoted – but when the last two shots comprise one of the most famous cuts (ape tosses bone, spaceship floats around the Earth) in the history of cinema, and somebody decides to modify this to a clumsy dissolve, I think that somebody needs to be told that maybe Stanley Kubrick deserves more respect.

David Thompson *London*

POLITICALLY INCORRECT

David Robinson is right to note (Letters, *S&S*, October) that *Man with a Movie Camera* was produced in Ukraine. But the view he quotes that it was "totally apolitical" is wrong. The Ukrainian programme he refers to, at the 2013 Giornate del Cinema Muto at Pordenone, was impressive and very political. However, there was a note of petty bourgeois nationalism in some presentations that Vertov would have attacked. David would have done better to quote from Yuri Tsivian's notes for

Pordenone's 2004 'Factories of Facts' retrospective, which record Vertov's and his comrades' move to Ukraine, but recognise their films' political substance. For example, the trick shot that makes the Bolshoi Theatre collapse: Vertov with "Left-wing writers and filmmakers alike perceived the Bolshoi [...] as an emblem of dated, portentous, etc. Art." It is the politics of *Man with a Movie Camera* that makes the film not only great but still relevant. **Keith Withall** *Leeds*

Additions and corrections

November p.72 *Effie Gray*, Certificate 12A, 108m 28s; p.62 *Gone Girl*, Certificate 18, 148m 51s; p.78 *The Judge*, USA/Australia 2014 © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., WV Films IV LLC and Ratpac-Dune Entertainment LLC (US, Canada, Bahamas & Bermuda) © Village Roadshow Films (BVI) Limited, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and Ratpac-Dune Entertainment LLC (all other territories) Warner Bros. Pictures presents in association with Village Roadshow Pictures, Ratpac-Dune Entertainment a Big Kid Pictures/Team Downey production. Colour by Technicolor; p.82 *Maze Runner*, The, Certificate 12A, 112m 35s (after cuts of 43s); p.64 *Nightcrawler*, Certificate 15, 117m 23s; p.86 *Overnighters*, The, Certificate 12A, 101m 36s; p.90 *Time Is Illmatic*, Certificate 15, 74m 57s; p.93 *The Way He Looks*, Certificate 12A, 96m 6s **October** p.64 *All Cheerleaders Die*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video certificate: 15, Running time: 85m 43s; p.75 *In Order of Disappearance*, the actor pictured is not Stellan Skarsgård, but Peter Andersson; p.92 *You and the Night*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video certificate: 18, Running time: 88m 35s

PIERROT LE FOU



The explosive finale of Jean-Luc Godard's delirious, discombobulating New Wave classic is a bewitching enigma

By Charlie Fox

"A voyage to the moon" is how Jean-Luc Godard described *Pierrot le fou* to a journalist in a flash of typically deadpan jest shortly after its premiere at the Venice Film Festival in August 1965. But that's more of a playful clue to the hallucinatory contents of this adventure than it might sound at first because, as if in accordance with Godard's puckish aphorism that "a film should have a beginning, middle and end but not necessarily in that order", the trip to the moon is contemplated about halfway through and the film actually drifts towards its conclusion on the Côte d'Azur and closes by gazing dreamily at the sun.

Lovers on the run, Anna Karina and Jean-Paul Belmondo find themselves in a film that escapes whatever category you might devise for it: an anarchic expression of the pleasures and perils of getting lost that is all at once a musical, an anti-capitalist reverie, a gorgeous essay film about painting and a romance in Brechtian camouflage. This kaleidoscopic assemblage of fragments is so gleefully discombobulating and formally provocative that it can still set off a bagful of fireworks in your mind, exploding all your assumptions about cinema.

Quick as a riddle, the ending is perhaps the most discreet and quietly baffling part of all, in which whatever flimsy approximation of reality there

was before is abandoned. The weirdly ominous parody of *film noir* that Belmondo and Karina have knowingly explored in between their wilder digressions has unravelled and the romance is over. Belmondo makes a pop art spectacle out of his suicide, encircling himself in brightly coloured dynamite like an anguished daredevil. He thinks twice, blindly fumbles for the hissing fuse, and gets obliterated in the blast. Then, all that's left is the vaguely feverish marvel of the sky and the sea, blurring into one another between the faint tails of a few clouds and a dying flare of evening sunlight. Karina and Belmondo's voices return for a little pillow talk, together reading a verse by Arthur Rimbaud, the 19th-century *poète-maudit*. The two of them take the lines in turn, beginning and ending with Karina's happy whisper: "It is found again"/"What?"/"Eternity"/"It's the sea"/"Gone with the sun..." Nobody has made much of this gnomic epilogue, which is much too artful to coalesce into any sort of straightforward finale. (Rimbaud's poetry is a perfect match: transparent, almost childlike, but endlessly puzzling, the meaning hidden somewhere down a hall of mirrors.)

The endings of Godard's early films are strange, feinting things just as often as they are tragic or aggressively frosty. *Bande à part* (1964) concludes at sea too, with shaky stock-reel footage promising a sequel (never to

arrive) in which Franz and Odile continue their adventures in South America and CinemaScope. Meanwhile, the crescendo of *À bout de souffle* (1959) remains faithful to the traditions of the gangster film – Belmondo, the existentialist hoodlum, is shot down before Jean Seberg, who watches him die, looks away, and then turns and stares straight at you, at once intimate and distant, a sphinx at the end of her screen test.

Other films that fade out on their own poetic grace notes, like Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout* (1971) or *Eureka* (1983), seem to play for the same effects, accomplishing a certain woozy temporal disconnection that transforms what you've seen into something more enigmatic and fantastical than it had appeared before. If it confirms anything, it's the inkling you've had all along that the film is best followed in the spirit of a crazed daydream, with all the whimsy and dissolving logic that that entails. Few scenes are more enchanting or inscrutable than whatever is suggested here – a dazed homage to the doomed lovers in the final moments of *Duel in the Sun*? A manifestation of Godard's despair about the collapse of his marriage to Karina and the haunting thought of an imaginary reconciliation? Something cryptic about the French New Wave? This is bewitching proof that endings can operate by far more volatile rules than you might have been taught at school, wandering off the map to perform mysterious subversions, submit haunting riddles or succumb to moments of spooky rapture. Or perhaps it's only meant to unmoor you from the film as gently as possible, just like a children's story in which everyone drifts off into a peaceful sleep on the very last page. 📺

If the ending confirms anything, it's the inkling you've had all along that the film is best followed in the spirit of a crazed daydream

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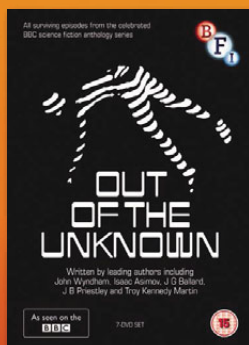
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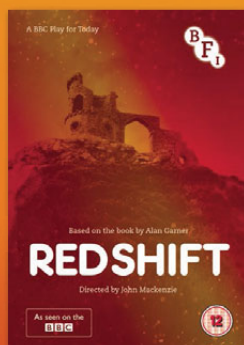
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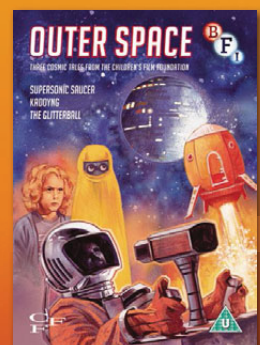
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